

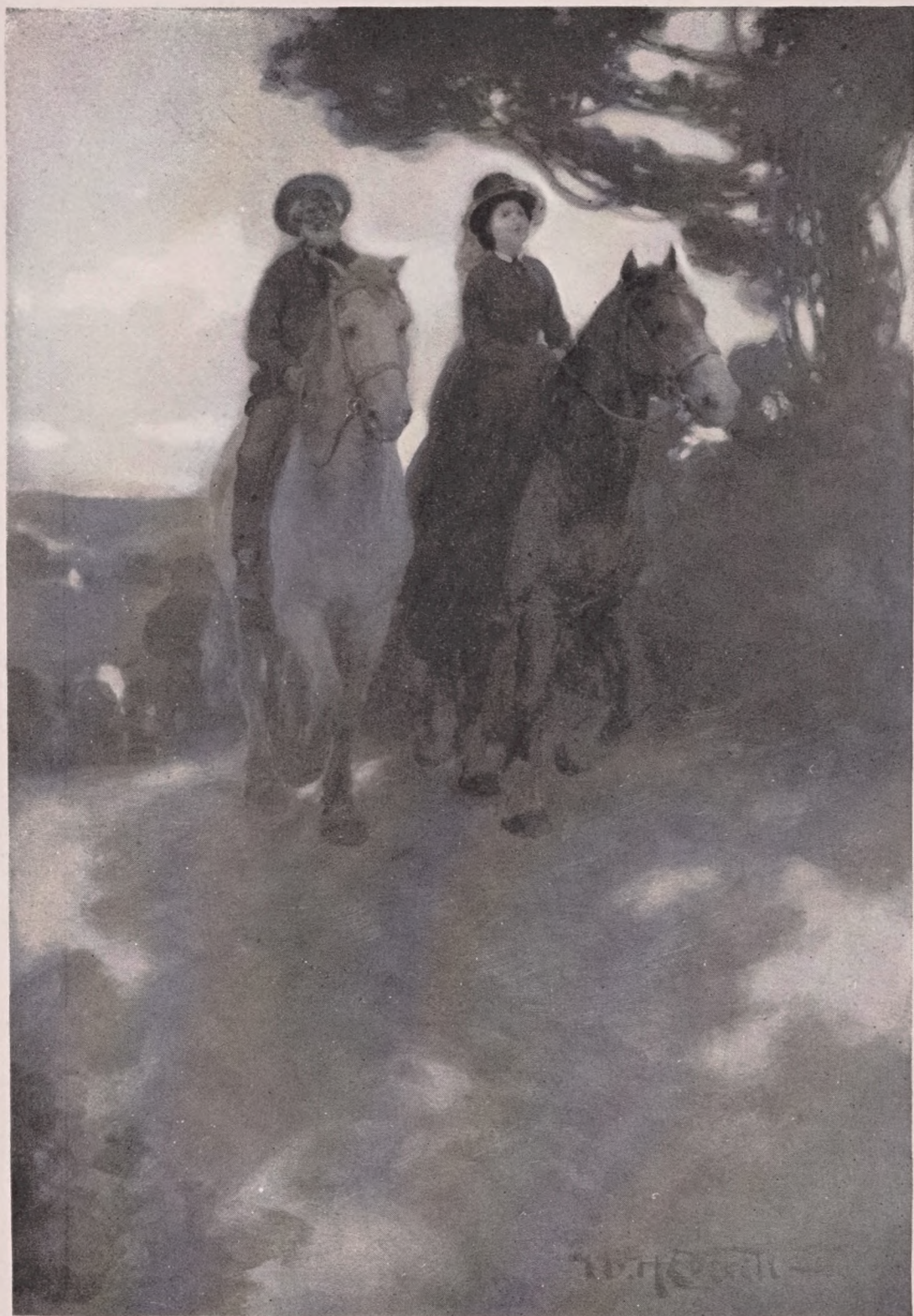


The HEART of HOPE

NORVAL RICHARDSON







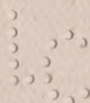
“THE SHOWER STOPPED, SO SHE GAVE SELIM THE REIN,
LETTING HIM CLIMB THE HILL AT HIS EASE ”

THE HEART OF HOPE

BY

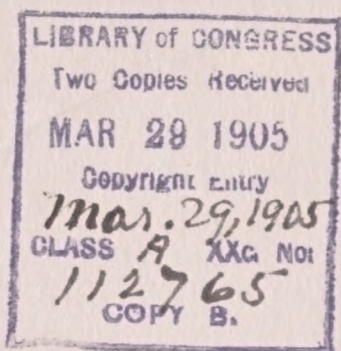
NORVAL RICHARDSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WALTER H. EVERETT



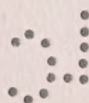
NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1905

PZ3
R395H



COPYRIGHT, 1905,
BY
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

Published, March



CONTENTS

	BOOK ONE	PAGE
<i>Prologue</i>		1
	BOOK TWO	
<i>Awakening</i>		17
	BOOK THREE	
<i>Heart of Hope</i>		97
	BOOK FOUR	
<i>Meeting</i>		157
	BOOK FIVE	
<i>Suspense</i>		245
	BOOK SIX	
<i>Recognition</i>		309
	BOOK SEVEN	
<i>Peace</i>		351

ILLUSTRATIONS

“THE SHOWER STOPPED, SO SHE GAVE
SELIM THE REIN, LETTING HIM CLIMB
THE HILL AT HIS EASE”

Frontispiece ✓

“‘ROBBING YOU?’ SHE ANSWERED
QUICKLY, HER ANGER RISING IN-
STANTLY”

Facing page 122 ✓

SILAS PLANTING THE FLAG

“ “ 188 ✓

“‘WHAT IF HE WERE WOUNDED,
FATHER?’ AGATHA INSISTED”

“ “ 248 ✓

“THEN THE CANDLE SLIPPED FROM
HER HAND, AND SHE FELL TO
THE FLOOR”

“ “ 318 ✓

BOOK ONE



Prologue

I

TWELVE slow strokes from the high clock tower rang out above the roar of the thunder. A flash of lightning lit up the dismal night.

The long street was deserted. From one end, where the bridge crossed the bayou, to the other, shut in by a high hill crowned with a huge, castellated building, the unbroken row of store fronts was dark and gloomy. The barred windows were black recesses filled with potent shadows. In the perspective made by the even fronts of the buildings, the river shone in the flashes of lightning. The lights had long been extinguished, and the whole place had settled down to quiet and sleep.

As the last sound of the clock died away, a man crept stealthily along the street in the shadow of the buildings. He had come from the hill beyond the town, running rapidly until he reached the bridge. At the foot of the long street he stopped and listened intently ; only the rolling echoes of the thunder broke

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the sultry stillness. He looked carefully about him, and then crept noiselessly along.

Presently he stopped before a large brick building, which stood on a corner. No glimmer of light showed on its silent exterior. The heavy barred windows and the dust and dirt about the door showed the lack of caretaker or occupant. A broken piece of iron railing across the stone steps added a note of desertion to the gloomy pile. Even in daylight people passed it with averted faces and hurried footsteps. It had long been the habitation of a band of gamblers, the offscourings of every town along the banks of the river. Other places had driven them out, until their numbers had gradually diminished to a company of ten. Their evil deeds had aroused the citizens of the town, but, though ordered by the police to leave, they had remained, defying both threats and legal authority.

The man crept into the shadow of the steps and waited. After a while he raised himself to a window near the door, and putting his mouth close to the heavy shutters gave a low whistle. Then sinking back into the darkness he lay flat against the ground.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Presently a squeaking sound came from behind the shutters—the sound of long unused, rusty hinges—and a face peered out between the slats.

The man rose quickly and stood close to the window. He spoke in a low, distinct whisper. “They are coming in half an hour. You must leave at once while everything is quiet. There’s no use trying to resist, for the whole town is aroused. Don’t let them take you by surprise.”

The shutter was closed stealthily from the inside, and the informer dropped to the pavement again.

A policeman strolled up the street and passed calmly on into the distance.

The shutter opened again. A voice came from behind it. “Where are we to go? Have you any plans for our escape?”

“There are two skiffs tied at the foot of the hill just across the bridge. Don’t go there yet. The river bank is being watched closely. Better try the cave. Your men know the way.”

“How about the boy?” the voice asked eagerly. “Did you get him?”

“Yes, and another one, too. They are gagged and tied in the cave now.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Good.” The man behind the shutter dropped a gold piece into the other’s outstretched hand. “We’ll see if Windom will start another town against us. This will fix him.”

The shutter began to close softly.

“Wait a minute,” the man from the outside whispered.

“Well, hurry up. We haven’t much time.”

“I’ll stay here until the men have gone. How many are there?”

“Ten.”

“If you get to the cave first and have any trouble, look for an iron slab at the far end. It covers an opening which leads to the bayou. You can crawl all the way out; I tried it to-day.”

He dropped back from the window and lay down near the steps. A few minutes passed, and the door slowly opened. A man came out on the steps and looked carefully up and down the street. Then he turned back and called softly into the building. After a low consultation he ran swiftly down the steps, closely followed by several others. They fled down the street noiselessly, their bared feet making no sound against the brick pavement.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

When the last one had come out the man in the shadow of the steps rose to his feet and looked intently along the deserted street. The flying figures were lost in the stormy darkness. Taking the opposite direction he ran swiftly around the corner of the building.

Suddenly the doors of a nearby building were thrown open and a crowd of men rushed down the street. They came rapidly on, the pistols in their hands flashing in the intermittent lightning.

The man stopped, undecided. They were near enough to see him now. There was nothing left him but to run for his life. As he turned the corner a shower of bullets fell about him. He stopped suddenly and leaned against the wall for support, blood gushing from a wound in his head. A man from the crowd sprang forward and knocked him down in spite of his fierce resistance. He gripped his antagonist with fury, at the same time drawing a knife from his pocket. There was a crunching sound as the blade passed through his antagonist's body and scraped on the brick beneath.

When the rest of the men reached them, both were lying still, their faces turned towards the dark sky.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

A cry of anger and despair came from the crowd, but there was no answer; their friend and leader was dead.

In a moment the door of the house was broken down. Fierce yells of disappointment came from the inside when the men found the house empty and saw that their foes had escaped. As they came out of the place they crowded about the wounded and unconscious gambler and dragged him into the middle of the street. The dead man had been carried to a nearby house.

"Make him speak, he is not dead," a man cried, flashing a lantern into the gambler's blood-stained face. "Make him tell where the others have gone."

A flask of whiskey was produced and the crowd waited impatiently for the fellow to regain consciousness. In a few minutes he opened his eyes and stared about. The glaring faces, the looks of fury, the pistol at his head precluded hope. He must tell what he knew or die. The wild faces closed about him. They waited breathlessly for his words. "They have gone to the cave back of Windom's house."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

A sudden tremor passed over his whole body; he felt numb and cold. He raised himself a little.

“Save the boys,” he gasped and fell back. “They are in the cave, too.”

The men looked at each other questioningly.

II

THE earthen walls of the cave shone damp and mouldy in the glimmer of the flickering candles. Flashes of lightning showed through the small opening; the roar of the thunder sounded distant and soft.

A group of men had already thrown themselves in a circle on the ground and were playing cards. The fascination of their profession deadened their senses to the surrounding peril.

Two children lay in the shadow, bound together with a heavy rope. Their arms and feet were tied so that they could not move. Their mouths had been forced open and gagged with pieces of wood. A man sat beside them, regarding them intently with an expression of satisfaction. He lifted his head and laughed hoarsely. The harsh sound startled the men intent upon their game. "What is it, Gordon?" one of them asked, looking up at him.

"Nothing—only this luck. My God, boys, do you know this will just wreck that scoundrel Windom's

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

life. We're quits now. He has tried to ruin me at every turn; I swore I'd get even somehow or kill him. But this will be better still. I have taken his child away from him and he will never see him again."

"But what are you doing with two of them? Windom only has one son?" the other fellow asked.

"Oh, that's some of Newton's work. He didn't know which was the right one, so he took them both."

"Do you know which is Windom's child?"

"No, but I'll get them both out of the way just to be sure." He laughed harshly again.

A vivid flash of lightning illumined the cave. The whole place reverberated with thunder. Suddenly a man sprang through the opening, falling headlong in his haste. The game broke up and the men crowded around him, consternation and fear written on all their faces.

"It's all up," he said. "Newton told where we were hid. They are in sight of the cave now. What 'll we do?"

The man beside the children picked them up quickly, and carried them into the deep shadow at the end of the cave. The darkness hid them entirely from the others. He stooped and lifted a heavy iron

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

slab from the ground and let the two children drop gently into the opening. He listened intently for the dull thud and then returned to his companions. They were standing in a group near the opening and listening earnestly to the voices of their pursuers, who were evidently consulting as to the best plan of action.

“We’re in for it,” said Gordon in a whisper. “Shoot the first man that enters.”

A heavy step sounded in front of the cave and the dark figure of a man stood before them. As they fired simultaneously he dropped without a word. An answering fire of bullets came from the outside, and the gamblers fell back against the walls of the cave, waiting for the expected rush. But it did not come. The man’s body had been dragged away from the opening and outside all was still.

The moments passed slowly. The men had blown out the candles, and stood in utter darkness, scarcely breathing. The intense silence was finally broken by the chopping of wood and the sound of snapping planks. Something was evidently being built in front of the opening. The men looked at each other in terror. The thought that they were to be buried

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

alive, sealed up in the earthen walls, blanched their rough faces. They stood undecided. Something had to be done at once.

The crackling sound of fire came to them, and they knew they were to be forced out of their hiding-place by the burning heat.

The man who had laughed over the boys slipped back again to the end of the cave and crawled into the opening. As he disappeared into the black depths he pulled the iron slab carefully back in place.

The fire grew rapidly in front of the opening. The bright glare penetrated into the cave, lighting up every corner of the gloomy place. Then followed a dense cloud of smoke. The air became sickening, suffocating. The nine men groped about helplessly. Finally, gathering close together, they uttered a wild yell and rushed out into the blazing roar of the fire.

III

THE storm broke with all its fury upon the town. The rain came down in solid sheets. The lightning flashed incessantly, followed by heavy crashes of thunder. The night became blacker and more opaque.

A man was walking slowly up and down along the bank of the river. He could not see the water; only the rushing sound of the wind-tossed waves made him know where he was. He had been searching for the skiff for hours, walking along the steep bank and peering down into the black abyss; but he could see nothing.

He returned to the two children where they lay against a log near the bank and examined them closely. They lay perfectly still, breathing in short, quick gasps.

The man turned away from them again, and slid down the steep bank. His feet touched the water, and he groped along slowly, feeling for the boat.

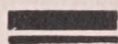
He walked a long distance, and had begun to retrace his steps when a clanking sound attracted his

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

attention. He followed the direction of the noise and soon had his hand on the chain which held the boat. Climbing back up the bank he lifted the two boys in his arms, carried them down to the boat, and placed them in the bottom of it. Then unfastening the boat, he pushed it out into the water, and jumped aboard.

The water surged beneath them. On all sides, wrapping them about, and shutting out all else, was the wild, raging storm.

BOOK TWO



Awakening

I

THE mortars were resting from their night's work. A few moments of quiet had come at last. The terrific, crashing noise, the shrill whistling of the Parrott shells, the thundering echoes reverberating down the valleys, had gradually died away, and the morning came gently, beautifully resplendent, as if spring were not to be interrupted in its message of hope—in its spirit of holiness and peace.

Agatha opened the hall door, and coming out on the broad porch, stood between the tall Doric columns in the cool shadows which the rising sun had not yet found.

Before her stretched a broad brick walk, bordered on both sides with smoothly trimmed box. At the end, through the gate in the high brick wall, she could see the uneven country road shining brightly in the morning sun, and beyond it, where the ground rose higher, a dense mass of trees—a small forest of beeches—which shut out the horizon from her vision.

The house was a large, square building of red

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

brick, with classic porches running across both the front and back. The white columns and the quiet shade of the brick gave the place an appearance of solidity—of permanence; while the green of the lawn, the surrounding vine-covered wall, the garden with its mass of bright colour, made of it in a true sense, a home.

Agatha glanced about her. The sky shone bright and sparkling as if made of blue enamel. The trees were pale green, the new delicious colour that comes with the early spring. The grass was like velvet, and the morning dew upon it suggested a silk veil stretched lightly across.

As her senses became accustomed to the quiet, the beauty of the early morning hour made Agatha lift up her head and breathe in the cool, pure air, and the fragrance of the honeysuckle that climbed on the garden wall.

Descending the steps lightly she walked down to the garden gate, and passing through stood by the side of the road. It stretched out on either side of her in a broken, zigzag line on the ridge of the long hill upon which the house stood.

Lifting her skirts out of the dust, she picked her

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

way carefully across the road and went directly on, into the dark shadows of the beeches. She passed quickly through the gloom, disturbing now and then a squirrel, that ran off, scampering across the branches, snapping here and there a twig, which made a startling sound in the stillness. Coming out suddenly upon the brow of a huge hill she threw herself upon the ground and resting her back against one of the sturdy old trees gazed out upon the scene before her.

From side to side, and as far as the eye could reach, lay a vast wilderness of level country, an unbroken flat stretch of dull green through which a wide river curved. Beginning almost on the horizon, like a small silver thread, and making two bends, it rounded a thickly wooded peninsula and swept with full force against the hill, passing rapidly on until it was lost in the distance, where the town nestled on the hills amid the trees.

II

AGATHA smiled upon the scene. It had greeted her every morning of her life for twenty years. The river was her daily companion, and the wonder of it, its breadth and depth, still held for her a world of interest—a world peopled by her imagination, her dreams, rather than her experiences. She had spoken aloud to it her hopes and ambitions, and it represented to her more and more a divine something to which she could speak and be heard. It was a confidante that she need never fear, for had it not held within its bosom thousands of human secrets which it had guarded closely until they had been merged in the depths of the mighty ocean?

She had wondered this bright May morning, if it would be the same to her as before; if it would still smile upon her in its quiet, peaceful way. She had walked eagerly through the wood, her heart beating high with anticipation. A great deal had happened since the morning before, and she longed to be still and think.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

She looked about her in bewilderment, half-unconsciously smiling.

“It is the same. It is I that have changed.”

She spoke to the scene before her, as to an intimate listener. She looked into its depths, as into a mother's eyes.

“How can I feel as I do when Robert is going away, perhaps forever! I may never see him again and yet nothing is changed for me. Am I heartless and unfeeling, or can it be possible that I do not love him? I don't feel as he does; I have never been sure of myself. I hoped something would come to test me and now it has come. He is going and I do not care. Have I been wrong in letting him believe I love him and call me his sweetheart? His sweetheart?” She repeated the word softly as if questioning its significance.

“Yet surely we have been happy together and when he does not come the day seems incomplete. I even listen for his voice at the gate and the sound of his horse's hoofs on the road. I remember how my heart beat when he told me he loved me. Still, when he had gone and I was alone, I knew it was not he I thought of, but the experience—the incident.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

That is it, he is an incident in my life; he does not fill it. I am deceiving him, for love must fill my life. It is nobler and more self-sacrificing than any feeling I have yet known."

She rose with the thought, and opened wide her arms, as if to embrace the new understanding that had come to her.

III

SUDDENLY a long, howling roar, followed by a screeching hiss, burst upon the morning quiet. Agatha looked towards the river where a mass of black objects, gunboats, were gathered together in a gloomy group. She watched the shell as it sped towards the town, leaving a light thread of smoke in its pathway.

Turning quickly, she retraced her steps to the house. She walked up on the porch, and opening the hall door entered the dark, cool house. She passed on through the hall to the back porch, and stopped there, leaning on the balustrade and scanning the orchard and vegetable garden which sloped down into the valley beyond.

To one side of the sloping ground stood a group of one-story cabins, their whitewashed walls shining bright and clean in the sunlight. In front of these an old man was busily currying and brushing a horse, which he had tied in the shade of a large tree.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Jeremiah!” called Agatha to him, “I want the buggy in about an hour. I am going into town.”

The old negro pulled off his hat respectfully, not attempting to restrain the surprise that showed upon his face.

“Fo’ de Lawd, Miss Agathy, you ain’t gwine to town wid all dem shells a-flyin’ about, is yer?”

Agatha did not hear him. She had turned and gone into the house, leaving the old man to marvel at her temerity.

She went directly to the dining-room, surprise showing on her face, when she saw her father already seated at the table. She stopped and kissed him before taking her seat, then began pouring the coffee from the large silver urn in front of her.

She made a beautiful picture as she served the coffee. Every movement was easy and graceful, showing the confidence of long experience at the task. She looked pure and bright, like the morning she had just been out to meet, and her white skin and delicate features showed that she had never known anything but daintiness and refinement.

Her morning gown was of light pink silk, small rosebuds showing here and there over the glistening

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

surface. The skirt was trimmed with bands of ruchings and opened from the waist down to show a mass of tiny linen ruffles, crisp, fresh and white. A Persian shawl of white crepe was thrown carelessly about her shoulders. The bluish-black coils of her hair, matching the depths of her eyes, were brought down in long waves from a broad part, entirely obscuring her ears, and tied low on the neck.

The room opened upon the garden, and through the tall windows which reached from the high ceiling to the floor the delicately scented air was wafted in.

Agatha glanced up at her father. He was still reading intently the morning paper, a small sheet of wall paper with printing on only one side.

“Is there anything new, father? Is this dreadful war never to end?”

She leaned back in her chair as she spoke.

“There must be a great deal of news from the size of the paper, this morning,” she continued. “It seems to be at least a foot in length. Isn’t there something encouraging?”

Her father shook his head sorrowfully.

“No, it is only a long letter from a Yankee officer,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

who was on the *Cincinnati* when she was sunk. It was found in his trunk which floated to shore."

He laid aside the paper and began his breakfast.

He was a fine-looking old man, his perfectly white hair and fresh complexion softening the lines which had so deeply furrowed his face. His eyes were of a cool, clear blue; eyes that would always remain bright and youthful. There was a tenderness about him, a gentle dignity which showed that love and sorrow had been the dominating influences of his life.

"I am afraid, Agatha, that the situation is becoming more gloomy."

There was a wistful tone in his voice as he spoke.

"It looks now as if this war were going to be interminable. The danger to us is becoming greater every day. The shelling does not interfere much with our daily life now, but the gunboats are only getting the range of their guns, and when that is done showers of shot will rain on us all the time. Then you must leave me, it will not be safe for you to be here."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha looked up quickly.

“Do you think for a moment, father, that I would leave you here alone during this awful time?”

She seemed to resent the suggestion.

“I shall make myself very comfortable, my child.” He made an attempt to talk lightly. “I shall go down to the cave if they begin shelling too heavily up here.”

“You mean the one we used to play in when we were children? It isn’t safe, is it?”

The old man’s brow clouded. His hands began to shake a little.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “the cave where you and the boys played the last day they were with us. So long ago, now, Agatha.”

He dropped his head in his hands and leaned forward on the table.

Agatha rose and went over to where he sat. She was distressed that the boys had been mentioned. It was a subject that she and her father had silently agreed never to discuss.

“Father, don’t make me leave you and go away from here. I can risk the danger as well as you, even better. I will begin to-morrow to make the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

cave comfortable, and it will be real fun to go down there and live in it."

Her face brightened with the prospect of the novelty.

The old man rose stiffly from his chair and walked slowly out into the garden. Seating himself on a rustic bench in the shadow of a magnolia tree, he filled a large meerschaum pipe and puffed at it comfortably.

The flowers bloomed about him in neglected profusion. Groups of larkspur, phlox, and poppies crowded the centres of the beds, while a tall line of hollyhocks formed a protecting fence about the garden.

In a few moments Agatha came out and walked towards him. She had changed the white shawl for a long black lace dolman that fell almost to the hem of her skirt, and upon her head she had put a tight-fitting white cambric bonnet, transparent, and showing the pink silk lining. It fitted about her face closely, projecting in front, and almost hiding her features from view. It was trimmed with black lace bands that hung far down her back. She carried a large bundle wrapped in coarse yellow paper.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I am going into town, father,” she said resolutely. “Our relief society meets this morning, and I want to take them the shirts that I have finished. I have really made six in two weeks. Isn’t that fine?”

He pulled her down on the seat beside him, patting her on the shoulder affectionately.

“Very fine, indeed,” he said. “They will never again have the chance of saying that our soldiers are not well dressed, will they? But why cannot Jeremiah take them in for you? The shells seem to be flying more thickly than usual this morning.”

Agatha became a little nervous in her impatience.

“Oh, father, do let me go, just to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing the girls surprised at what I have done. You know I never was a good hand with a needle—you have told me mother was not either—and I want to prove to them that I can do something. Besides, the shells are not causing much trouble yet. No one seems to be afraid of them.”

She got up, gently leading the way to the gate, her father’s arm still around her.

The resemblance between the two was not marked. It became more noticeable when one had known them

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

both well and had seen them separately. It was the resemblance that comes of two lives spent together, in sympathy and understanding. The tragedy of the man's life had left him entirely dependent for companionship upon the girl—his only daughter. They had dwelt alone, growing out of personal touch with the world to such a degree that as Agatha developed into a woman she cared less and less for the social life which was open to her, her contentment and happiness being greatest when her evenings were spent at home with her father; the two sympathetic natures alone in the library, surrounded by walls of books.

Her life had become practically a series of subjective experiences, so broad was it in the intellectual, so narrow in the personal.

At the gate a high-swung buggy, with a massive hood, was standing. Jeremiah made a stately figure in his threadbare livery. His dignity and importance made him overlook such trifling details as a frayed-out hat brim, and the green, weather-stained appearance of his coat. He held the reins tightly in his hands and looked with eyes full of doubt upon the scene before him.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Don’t expect me home until late this evening, father,” Agatha said. “I think I shall probably stay to dinner with Mrs. Sentrill. You know Robert is going away to-day, and she will be all alone.”

“Ah, I see,” her father said, smiling. “That is the reason you are so anxious to go to the society meeting to-day.”

Agatha blushed guiltily as she climbed into the buggy, Jeremiah flourished the whip and they went off down the road at a good pace, a cloud of dust rising back of them.

Mr. Windom stood at the gate watching them until the turn of the road hid them from sight. Then he turned and walked slowly back to the bench under the magnolia tree. “How am I to get her out of this town before the danger becomes too great?” he said thoughtfully, as he watched the smoke float gently up from his pipe.

IV

THE horse drew the high chaise swiftly along the road. The sun had risen well into the sky and the warmth of its rays was beginning to dispel the morning freshness. Agatha raised a ruffled pink parasol and shaded her face from the glare.

The road lay along the top of the hill which sloped down on one side to the river, on the other stretching down into uneven green meadows, dotted here and there with large white houses. Farther over, where the hills began to rise again, forming the chain that surrounded the town, was the graveyard, the tombstones mere dots upon the soft green.

At the end of the long road they came suddenly to the brow of the hill. It jutted off abruptly into the valley, which narrowed at this point, forming a channel for the bayou which flowed through into the river.

Before them lay the town, in the quiet noonday heat, the long streets, bright earth-yellow in colour,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

marking the town into squares, as in a map. A few large buildings stood out prominently from the rest, the central point of the scene being the classic stone structure which crowned the hill, and from which the plan seemed to radiate.

Jeremiah held the horse up tightly before descending the hill. He shook his head doubtfully.

“Miss Agathy,” he began, “it looks powerful dangerous to me to cross dat ’ar bridge ober de bayou. Jes’ look at dem shells ’dah.”

He held up his whip, gesticulating.

Agatha looked about her impatiently. The stillness was broken every few minutes by the whistling shells passing swiftly on to the town. She would follow the direction of the sound with her eyes, until the dull explosion showed that the shell had finished its mission. The effect of the whole scene was unnatural—too unreal to be convincing. From the distance the town seemed quiet and peaceful, with everything in its accustomed place, and yet, above it all, were these flying shells—messengers of death—sometimes exploding in the air, at others descending without noise into a clump of trees.

“We will risk it anyhow, Jeremiah,” Agatha

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

said resolutely. "I am not afraid. Don't you be a coward."

The negro reluctantly gave the horse a touch with the whip and they began to descend the long hill.

The road had been dug deep into the earth so as to lessen the grade, and the walls of earth rose on both sides, obscuring the view and filling the air with a damp, mouldy odour. Passing down they came out into the open again, and crossing the bridge drove up the long hill into the town. With the urging of the somewhat alarmed Jeremiah, the horse went steadily along, soon coming to a stand-still before a house set far back in a yard of large trees.

Everything was quiet about the place, and no one was to be seen in the yard or upon the verandah, although the door stood wide open.

"Mrs. Sentrill," called Agatha, from her seat in the buggy.

No answer came.

"Jeremiah, wait here for me. I will go in and find out where they are."

She jumped from the buggy and ran up the walk. No one answered her knock and she entered the deserted and lonely looking hall. Passing through

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

several of the rooms and finding no one, she called out loudly again. At last she heard sounds coming from under the hall floor. A trap-door opened and a negro woman put her head out.

“Lordy, Miss Agatha, is dat you? What you doin’ in heah wid all dis shot a-flyin’.” She blinked her eyes in the strong light, her face looking ashy in her great fear.

Agatha could not restrain herself at the sight of the absurd figure and began to laugh.

“Come out of there, Indianne,” she said. “There is nothing to be afraid of. I want to find out where Mrs. Sentrill and Mr. Robert are.”

The negress slowly emerged from her hiding place.

“She’s upstairs, Miss Agathy. She wouldn’t come down heah this mornin’ cause Marse Robert’s goin’ away. She jes’ trying Providence up dah in dat room,” pointing to the upstairs rooms.

“Then Mr. Robert has gone?” asked Agatha, eagerly.

“Yes, m’am, he’s done been gone an hour.”

Agatha went quickly upstairs. Before she reached Mrs. Sentrill’s room she heard a low, moaning sound, and opening the door gently she entered. It was

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

almost in total darkness, the heavy green blinds shutting out the light. She stopped a moment waiting for her eyes to accustom themselves to the dim light. Gradually she was able to discern a little old woman sitting in the middle of the room, rocking to and fro. She held a handkerchief to her face and was sobbing pitifully. She was a pathetic figure, so forsaken, so forlorn, in the dark room.

Agatha watched her a moment. Then going to her she knelt down beside the chair, and putting her arms about the old lady kissed her gently.

"I came to see Robert again before he left," she began softly. "I thought he was not to leave before this afternoon and that he would be with you until then."

The little woman dried her eyes and looked up. Her face was pitiful in its dumb misery. Her eyes were red with weeping, and the expression of suffering made them look almost unintelligent. She held on to the young girl as to a support, her voice broken with little gasps—sobs—as she spoke.

"He had to report at headquarters early, but he is coming back to tell me good-bye. It is almost time now. Oh! Agatha, Agatha, how can I stand it? He

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

is going to leave me forever, I know it. You can't understand how I feel. If I had only died before this came to me."

She broke down again, sobbing. Putting her sorrow into words seemed to have given it more painful reality.

"But others have come back safely. Why not Robert?" Agatha said soothingly. "Think how many have gone into battle and have returned to us just as they left. You must think of the glorious victories that he will be in, of the honours he will win."

Mrs. Sentrill shook her head sorrowfully.

"Those are the hopes of youth, girl. Wait until you are my age. Then your whole life will be centred in one person; one that is a part of you, a being to whom you have given life. I am old and forgotten. I have outlived my friends. I can't lose my boy. There would be nothing left—the thought that he may not come back to me drives me mad."

Her sobbing ceased, and she looked steadily before her, staring into the doom that her grief had created.

"And he is so bright and gay with it all. He told me this morning that he had been waiting for this

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

opportunity for two years—that the dull work given him in this sleepy town was killing him. He would tell me every few moments that he was actually going to see a battle, to be in it himself. Little did he know that each time he said it he was stabbing me.”

A tear trickled slowly down Agatha’s face. She rose and walked over to the window. Loosening the clasp of the shutter she threw it wide open. A bright streak of sunlight shot into the room.

“You see, that is a sign of hope, of victory,” she said, pointing to the light. “That means that he is coming back to you—to us—in a few days, with fine tales of his brave deeds. Let us both look on it in that way, shan’t we, Mrs. Sentrill?”

The old woman seemed to be buoyed up a little by the girl’s hopeful view. Her interest returned a little to the things about her.

“There is his lunch, Agatha. I made him everything he likes with my own hands. You know how fond he is of fried chicken, and those tall biscuits, and no one can make them as well as I.” She fingered a large box tied with a crumpled red ribbon and looked at it lovingly, as if it had already been the constant companion of her son.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha turned away.

“We had better go downstairs, now,” she said, a sob catching in her voice. “I wanted to see Robert before he left, but I will not wait here. I know you want the last moments alone with him. Tell him I will be in the Court House yard and to stop there on his way to the train.”

She led the way down the steps, the old lady following her closely.

Indianne and her companions had mustered courage enough to come up from their cellar retreat, and were now gathered in a small group in the rear of the hall. Agatha turned to them before leaving.

“You mustn’t get so frightened again, Indianne.” She smiled at them all. “And don’t let Mrs. Sentrill stay up there alone any more. It is not good for her.”

The two women walked out on the verandah.

The old lady had brightened greatly under the influence of Agatha’s cheerfulness. She had ceased her sobbing entirely and had wiped away the tears. Her morbid grief had been momentarily forgotten in the interest of their conversation.

“How is your father, Agatha?” she asked.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Very well. He seems to keep up splendidly. You know we don’t suffer from the shelling in the least. They seem to have concentrated on the town. Besides, they can’t see our house from the river.”

“But it is very dangerous for you to come into town. You should remember that you are your father’s mainstay now—all he has in the world. Does he talk to you much about your brother, my dear?”

Agatha shook her head sadly.

“No, he seems to have given up all hope of hearing of him years ago. We never mention the subject now. It only opens up old wounds.”

She pulled some roses from a vine that was climbing about the verandah and slipped them into her belt. Then putting her arms around Mrs. Sentrill she kissed her again.

“When you get lonely send for me. I am not afraid of the shelling, and will come to you at any time.”

V

AGATHA walked slowly to the buggy where Jeremiah was waiting for her. She told him to drive on up the hill to the Court House, a handsome old building of grey stone, each side forming a massive porch of Corinthian columns, and built upon high ground terraced down to the four streets that bordered it. On each of the four corners of the lot were large cistern houses, also classic in design. Tall oak trees grew about, making a fine setting for the grey stone.

Agatha got out, and Jeremiah drove off to the shade of some trees, seeking not only protection for the horse from the sun, but cover from the shells for himself.

Agatha passed in between the huge iron gates and going up the broad steps walked through the yard to the western side of the building. Here it was cool and quiet, and she could think undisturbed of the scene through which she had just passed.

Sorrow had been almost an unknown factor in her

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

life, such was the protection and care that her father exerted over her. So narrowed had it been, so closed in from all outside influences, that nothing of grief or the breaking of any ties had as yet touched her. The separation from her brother had come too early to have made any lasting impression upon her. At the time it was only the loss of a companion, a play-fellow, who had represented to her girlish imagination all that was ideal.

Mrs. Sentrill's grief had shocked and surprised her. It made her feel that she had missed something important in life by not being able to feel and suffer as this woman did. She wondered if she should ever feel anything so keenly, or if she were only a selfish creature incapable of such strong emotion. She had had no doubts about Robert's return. Her mind had not pictured the dreadful scenes through which he would pass. She had not even thought of him as going into battle; only that he was leaving her for a time, and would come back the same light-hearted fellow that she had always known.

She sat down on the terrace and looked out over the town. A band was playing somewhere in the distance, the soft melody floating to her across the house tops.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Occasionally came the shrieking of a shell, followed by the explosion. The danger of the situation had never impressed her.

Suddenly she heard the sound of footsteps, and knew that Robert was coming to her. She trembled a little without knowing why, but feeling that a crisis in their relationship was about to take place.

When she looked up he was standing before her, his grey uniform clean and bright, his fresh complexion and light hair fairer than ever. In her impression of him that morning she remembered long afterwards that his eyes had seemed to her too light, with too much white about them, a something that made her feel a little less confidence in his integrity. He was smiling down at her, his admiration and love showing in the glance.

"I am glad you came, Robert," she said haltingly. It was difficult for her to find a way of expressing what she wished. "I wanted to tell you something that has come to me this morning."

He waited, without interruption. While she hesitated he sat down beside her and took her hand in his.

"I don't want you to go away from me believing all

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

you say you do about me. I don't want you to think so highly of me. I am not worthy of it, Robert."

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. Agatha looked helplessly on the ground. She felt that she was not expressing at all what she meant.

"You see, Robert, I am not at all sure that you are leaving a very true girl behind you," she began again. "I don't want you to think that I shall be sad or unhappy while you are away. I shall not be that."

Robert looked a little bewildered but said nothing.

"When I saw your mother's grief a little while ago," she continued, "I realised that I knew nothing of really deep feeling. I don't believe I am even capable of it."

She stopped hopelessly. How could she tell Robert that she did not love him? It would be too cruel when he was so happy in his confidence in her love, so thrilled with the joy of being a soldier.

Robert laughed lightly.

"Agatha," he said, "what in the world is making you so solemn this morning? I never have seen you in such a mood before. Do cheer up and be a little gayer. You know I think you are the sweetest girl in the world, and nothing that you can say against

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

yourself will make me love you less. It is my greatest happiness to know that you love me and that we shall be married when this war is over."

As he stopped speaking the bell in the tower above them began to toll the hour. They counted the strokes, and as the last one died in the air, Robert rose and started to go. He took both of Agatha's hands in his.

"But, Robert, you don't understand," she began.

"Oh, yes I do, dear," he said impatiently. He drew her to him quickly, and kissed her several times upon the lips. As she leaned passively in his arms she wondered why she had ever let him kiss her before. It seemed so meaningless now. When she looked up again he was gone, and she had not told him what was in her heart. He had laughed and said he understood her perfectly. How little he knew what he was saying.

VI

SHE sat there waiting, hoping that he might come back. She resolved to tell him surely this time, that there might be no misunderstanding in the future. The music from the band still came to her with the changes of the breeze, and presently a cheer rose from many throats. She started up and stood undecided a moment. Then she walked quickly back to where she had entered the grounds and waved to Jeremiah to drive up to the gate.

“Drive to the station, quick,” she told him, “I want to see the train with the soldiers on it before it leaves.”

The horse jumped forward at the touch of the negro's whip, and soon they were speeding down the street at an alarming pace. Turning corners sharply, not slackening their gait for the steep hills and uneven places, they soon came into the crowd that was blocking the streets near the station.

The troops had chosen a good hour for their departure, for the gunboats were resting from the fierce

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

shower of shells to give the guns a chance to cool. A great crowd of people were abroad in the streets, old men on crutches led about by boys, women with babies in their arms and little children tugging at their skirts and crying with fright as they were jostled by the throng. There was a haggard look about them all. The long year of suffering, the lack of wholesome food, was writing its story upon their faces.

Agatha left the buggy, for the crowd was too great for a vehicle to make any progress, and pushed her way in among the people. It was almost impossible at first for her to make any headway, but gradually she wedged her way along until she reached the street that looked down on the station. Here she had a good view of the whole scene.

The hill back of her which rose abruptly from the street was packed with a mass of people, giving the effect of a thousand blurred colours. The street was lined with them even down to the track where the car, draped with long bands of red and white bunting, stood ready to leave.

Despite the moving mass of human beings an ominous silence reigned everywhere. The crowd

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

might almost have been petrified so little noise escaped them. The deafening roar of the cannon firing a salute jarred upon the silent grief of the people with a sense of shock. They had seen soldiers leave for the battlefield before. They knew how few came back, and in what condition. These things were in their minds as they stood there watching the preparations for the departure. They did not feel like cheering—it was only that they wanted to get a last look at their loved ones.

A cheer arose several blocks away and the soldiers began to march down the street towards the station. The band preceded them, playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The shrill sound of the fife rose above the regular beating of the drums; and the crowd separated as the steady tramp came nearer and nearer. When they came into full view of the crowd, the sun shone brightly upon the mass of grey. Before them flying in the breeze was the red flag with the diagonal cross upon it. There was no excitement, no breaking of ranks. The men went calmly into the cars and took their seats. The train was ready to start.

A few women gathered together and stood out from the crowd. The cannon stopped its firing, the band

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

was hushed, and the sound of their voices, singing, was lifted upon the still air.

“March on, march on!

All hearts resolved on victory or death!”

The line ended in a wail. The singers were unable to finish their song. They broke down sobbing. A low moan of sorrow went up from the streets, from the crowded hillside, and echoed far off into the hills.

Old wounds had been opened afresh by the scene. Each felt the personal note in the country's trial and none tried to keep back the tears.

Agatha stood watching it all as in a dream. It seemed that she was looking on at a play, that the curtain would fall in a moment, and she would come out into the world again.

It had affected her keenly. She had sobbed like thousands of others, and as the train began to move slowly she could scarcely see it through her tears. Many handkerchiefs were waving from the car windows, and thinking that Robert might be waving one of them, having seen her in the crowd, she raised her hand high above her head and waved until the train passed the brow of the hill and disappeared from view.

VII

AGATHA remained a while upon the hillside where she had climbed to get a better view and watched the crowd quietly disperse. She was still under the influence of the scene she had been witnessing; still pondering upon the awakening that had come to her that morning. The scenes that had followed seemed a natural sequence in her development. The inconsolable grief of Mrs. Sentrill had come to her as a new experience and had opened her eyes to the narrowness of her own life. And she could still hear that one long sob of the people far off across the river where the willows bent in the gentle breeze.

Suddenly she was aroused from her reverie by the shriek of a shell. A terrific explosion followed. The deafening roar made her stagger and clutch at a tree for support. When she recovered the men had run to the railroad track where the train had stood a few minutes before. A deep hole had been dug there by the shell; not a vestige of the iron rail was to be seen for yards.

Agatha shuddered and retraced her steps towards

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the cart. If the shell had fallen a few minutes sooner devastation and death would have been certain. She put her hands up to her face as if to shut out the horrible thought.

When she had returned to the buggy her package of shirts recalled to her one of the commissions which had brought her to town. As they drove slowly back through the still streets a few stragglers were still hanging about the corners, but most of them had already sought more protected places.

She stopped before an old brick church on the corner, and taking her bundle, dismissed Jeremiah for an hour or more. The old negro whipped up the horse sharply and soon settled himself behind the protection of a large hill towards the edge of the town, where he could doze comfortably out of the range of the shells and the horse could graze by the side of the road.

VIII

AGATHA carried her bundle to one of the side doors of the church opening into the basement. Several girls rose as she entered and hastened towards her, taking her package and opening it eagerly without waiting for her permission.

The Relief Society, as they proudly called themselves, was composed of twenty young women who spent most of their time sewing and making garments for the soldiers. The lack of clothing was appalling, the need of it was absolute, and the young women had done good work. The basement of the brick church had been chosen for their meeting place, its solidity and situation being considered sufficient protection from the bombardment.

They were gathered in a circle when Agatha entered, the conversation keeping up merrily as the needles flew in and out of the coarse cloths.

"Have you really made six shirts, Agatha?" said Kitty Merritt as she untied the bundle. There was a touch of sarcasm in her voice. "That's not bad for you. I didn't expect to see two."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Don’t boast, Kitty,” Agatha said, smiling. “What have you to show for such brave talk?”

Kitty seemed a little embarrassed by the question.

“Well, everyone knows that I have been sick and couldn’t sew much. I made these four in three days.”

As Agatha sat down many sidelong glances were cast in her direction. All the girls knew that she and Robert Sentrill had been engaged for several years, and that he had left town that day to go into the field. They were curious to know how Agatha had stood the ordeal. Many of them had been through it, and knew too well what it had meant to them. Two of the small number had already come to the gathering one morning in sombre black, their blanched and tear-stained faces speaking plainly of their loss. The others had gone to them quietly and kissed them. Nothing was said. It was a sorrow that refused the sympathy of words.

Agatha knew that they were looking at her, criticising her appearance, and her heart went out to them as she glanced over many of the young faces that already had begun to age. Their gowns had long ago shown signs of giving out, and the many darned places, turned over and re-made parts, were a dismal

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

sign of the increasing lack of comforts among the townspeople.

She examined with interest the bundles of shirts strewn about on the floor, looking at some carefully, smiling at others, until she picked up a little package containing three shirts that would have been too small for a boy ten years old.

She held it up laughing heartily.

“Who on earth made this? It isn’t big enough for a baby.”

All of them joined in the chorus of laughter with one exception—a young girl about sixteen, who was sitting a little out of the circle, her bright golden curls hanging about her shoulders. She pouted at their laughter and seemed about to cry.

“I told you I didn’t know how to make shirts,” she began plaintively, “but you said I could learn. Now you see I can’t.” She tossed her head pettishly.

At this the girls began to laugh more heartily.

“If we had known you were going to waste all that flannel we should not have given it to you,” said Kitty Merritt, feeling her superiority of age and experience.

Agatha looked at her reproachfully. She felt

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

guilty for having started the laugh at the little girl. She went over and sat down beside her.

“Never mind, Janie, they can’t do any better themselves. Don’t let them tease you. You will do much better next time.”

Janie smiled and the girls settled down to work.

Presently another member came hurrying in dragging a huge bundle after her. She was a stout girl dressed in a grey homespun gown. A yellow bonnet fitted tightly about her face, with a huge bow of the same coloured ribbon under her chin.

“Oh, girls,” she cried, falling into a chair, “get me some water quick. I think I am going to faint.”

They all crowded about her, but she waved them back with her hands.

“Get away from me. What I want is air. Don’t crowd so. I’ll tell you as soon as I feel better. It is this bonnet.” She tugged helplessly at the bow that held it in place.

“Let me take it off for you,” said Kitty, untying the strings.

“Why it smells of turpentine, Melinda! Where have you been?”

Melinda shook her head in despair.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“And it is all stuck to your hair. I don’t believe I can get it out. It is all sticky with something.”

“Get the scissors and cut it. I don’t care, just so I never have it near me again. I am so sick. Isn’t the smell awful?”

Someone brought the scissors and Kitty began to cut here and there, but the bonnet would not give, even to the keen edge of the scissors.

Melinda still kept urging them to hurry.

“I shall have to cut your hair in places, Melinda. Do you mind?” asked Kitty.

“No. I mind nothing except the bonnet. Do anything you can to get it off.”

With a few deft strokes of the sharp blades, Kitty lifted off the bonnet, with long strands of hair hanging to it and placed it in Melinda’s lap.

“For mercy sake take it away,” the stout girl exclaimed, throwing it into a corner.

The girls ran over and picked it up, taking it to the window to examine it more closely.

“My, but I feel better,” said Melinda, taking a deep breath. “Girls, let me tell you,” as they all gathered interestedly about her. “Don’t ever buy any hats from that horrid Madame Jansen. She is

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

a cheat. She told me that thing," pointing scornfully to the bonnet, "was ze newest ting in bonnets," mimicking the foreign accent. She said it had just been smuggled through New Orleans for her at a great expense, and that she would sell it to me for exactly what she had paid for it, one hundred dollars in Confederate money. I really thought it was very becoming and stylish, so I bought it. When I started here to-day I thought I would wear it and let you all see it. When I got out into the street where the sun was shining hot, I began to notice a peculiar odour. I thought of course that someone was painting a house and paid no attention to it, but the odour kept getting stronger and stronger and seemed to follow me. Then I began to realise that it was about me. I put my hands up to that bonnet and they stuck to it. Girls, it is nothing but some cloth made stiff with varnish. Please throw it out of the window. I can't stand even a suspicion of the odour, now."

She opened the collar of her heavy gown and rolled back her sleeves to her elbows. As she recovered, her capacity for management came back to her.

"Come here, girls, all of you." She pulled the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

large bundle she had brought with her up to her and untied it. "I have found out something we can make besides shirts."

Everyone was intently interested at once. She waited a moment to give her words weight. Then she said in a solemn, reverential tone:

"Pants!"

"Oh, Melinda, where did you get the pattern," asked timid little Jeanne.

Melinda gave her a withering glance.

"Now don't make out like you are shocked, Miss Priss," she said. "I got them from father's old trunk in the garret. They are a pair which he never wears, and we can cut a pattern from them. Let's try making a pair this afternoon and see what we can do."

The trousers were carefully brought out of the package and laid on the floor.

"Now, smooth out some paper, girls, so I can cut this side of the pattern."

Melinda superintended the cutting and they were soon busily at work. The stillness was only broken by the whirring of the needles and the snapping of the thread.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Once every little while there would be a startling explosion in the distance, and each of the girls would look up with anxiety.

Suddenly Melinda stood up and threw her work from her.

“Listen, girls!” she cried. “Would you believe it? We have been making these pants out of blue cloth. How horrible! Suppose some of our men had put them on. They would have been shot for Yankees.”

They arose and threw the pieces from them, pushing the scraps into the corner. Kitty Merritt’s face showed her disgust at Melinda’s stupidity in not finding out the mistake before, not once realising that she had failed to see it herself.

As the slanting rays of the sun told them it was late in the afternoon the girls began to fold up their work. Kitty had been telling the crowd of a letter that had been smuggled to her through the Union lines. It was from a cousin of hers who had been caught in the midst of the Federal army. She had written her that the worst experience was that the soldiers would take every tooth brush in the house, because they could not buy any more; and one

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

cavalry-man had put her new bonnet on his horse's head and said "Get up, Jack," and her bonnet was gone. Kitty had finished the anecdote with a toss of her head, saying proudly, "I would like to see any of them treat me that way. What I would say——" and she left the remainder to the other girls' imagination.

"I wonder how we could stand it," mused Agatha, as she rose to go.

Kitty's story of the letter had brought more forcibly to her mind the helpless position of girls in warfare than anything had yet done.

They all strolled to the gate together, and scattered in different directions laughing and chattering.

IX

JEREMIAH had not yet come and Agatha was left standing alone in the fading lights. The mortars were resting for a few moments, and the quiet beauty of the scene brought peace to her heart.

Across from where she stood, a yard was full of bright, blooming flowers. A wire pyramid of geraniums made a tone of delicious pink upon the white wall of the house. Somewhere in the distance birds were singing. Amid all this peace and calm it was hard for Agatha to realise that an awful war was raging about her; a war that her father had told her meant ruin, desolation, death. She thought of that day, two years before, when she had gone into town with him to see the parades, the bonfires, to hear the music and the fierce, jubilant ringing of the bells that announced the secession of each State. He had told her it meant that everyone would have to go to war, and as they drove home that cold February night the words sank deep into her mind

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and made her lean closer to his side. "Ruin, desolation, death." She had repeated them over again and again to herself.

After a while Jeremiah and the cart appeared and they drove home in the dim twilight. She lingered a moment in the garden. A light breeze had sprung up, lifting her hair softly off her brow. She wanted to rest a moment before going in to her father, and the soft evening light was refreshing to her. Her brain felt hot and feverish from the excitement of the scenes she had passed through. She sat down on the bench that surrounded a small fish pond and let her hand sink into the cool depths of the water. She could see the reflection of the stars in the limpid depths, and with the ripple caused by the splash of her hand they were multiplied into thousands. It made her think of the thousand sensations that must be coming to her if each day of her life were to open up new feelings and stir the depths of her soul, as this one had done.

She moistened her brow with the cool water, and rising, looked across the valley. The large, orange-coloured moon was just beginning to show through a wood of oaks upon the opposite hill. The branches

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

of the trees stood out strongly, silhouetted against the light. A harmony of sounds came with the approaching night. The buzzing of insects, the vibrating call of the locusts and in the distance the rhythmic chant of the frogs made a penetrating twilight hymn.

She turned and went into the dining-room. The servants were laying the table for supper and she went to her own room to change her gown. Her father had always kept up a certain amount of form in his household. The slaves were all well trained, and the housemaids had been particularly drilled in their tasks. He had always insisted upon dressing for their evening meal, and Agatha had carried out the plan to please him so long that it had grown into a habit.

When the supper bell sounded, she came down in an elaborate evening dress. It was made of white tarletan, the large, flaring hoop-skirt covered with a mass of tiny ruffles that graduated from the bottom to the top. Her neck and shoulders were bare, the waist being cut low, and finished around the top with a deep flounce of lace, a little yellowed with age.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Around her throat was a coral necklace, holding in place a glistening gold cross. Her face was very pale, except for the scarlet lips, and her black eyes, softened into tenderness by the long lashes, looked brighter than usual. The steady candle light shone brightly upon her full, white shoulders and glossy hair. ~

As she came into the dining-room, she stopped at her father's chair and kissed him. He held her hand for a moment, looking up at her.

"Why, Agatha!" He seemed surprised. "There is no ball to-night, is there?"

She shook her head, laughing.

"No, only I am so tired of all those old things I have been wearing that I felt that I must get into something a little new—at least, a frock that I have not worn lately."

She slipped into her chair, managing adroitly the cumbersome hoop-skirt, and rested her hands before her on the table.

The room was brilliantly lighted. The tall mantel-piece had four candle-sticks upon it, with large glass shades to protect them from draughts. The glass surfaces were etched with designs of fruit and birds.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

There were other candles grouped upon the sideboard and serving tables, shining brightly on the silver of a century's accumulation.

Almost everything in the room was of another generation, and had its story to tell of other events than those of the present.

Agatha was proud of these heirlooms and of the traditions which they embodied. She felt that all the courage, all the pride that was in her had come down from these remote ancestors, and would help her over the rough places and give her strength to travel calmly to the end.

"Father," she began, "when will this dreadful war be over?"

The old man looked at her yearningly.

"Who can tell, Agatha? It seems to me interminable. Something may happen in the next few days to break the monotony of this existence. I am glad you have brought up the subject, for I have wanted to speak of it to you for a long time. It seems Grant is concentrating on this place. It is his plan to take the city, and I believe he will do it. The river must be open to him all the way down, and this is the last place to resist him. Pemberton has gone to meet him,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and in a week at most there will probably be a battle. All we can do is to pray for victory."

Agatha listened intently, resting her face in her hands.

"If we are defeated the town will be assaulted from the rear. If the Yankees surround the town we shall be exposed to the fire from beyond the hills, and what troubles me most is how to take care of you. This is not the place for you to stay."

Agatha looked hurt. She anticipated his thought.

"Send me away and you stay here alone? Never."

She emphasised the last word with a toss of her head.

"Why not, Agatha? You can go to Elmwood, and stay with Amanda. They would be glad to have you and you would not be in any danger there."

Agatha shook her head impatiently.

"We will not discuss that, father. I am going to stay with you whatever happens."

The old man shook his head in disapproval.

"Don't be angry, father." Agatha smiled at him. "You may as well let me stay, for it is already decided."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Her father glanced up brightly. A sudden inspiration had come to him.

“Then, Agatha,” he began, slowly feeling his way, “Will you do this much for me? I don’t want you to be too much alone. Will you go out and spend a few days with Amanda, and ask her to let one of the girls come back with you? You cannot be left alone, and the slaves may leave us at any moment. I have heard reports everywhere of their flight whenever the Union army is near. Will you do as I ask?”

He leaned forward, looking at her earnestly.

“You say that, father, as if I would not do anything for you except go away and leave you. If you think I should have someone here with me I will get someone to-morrow. I will take Selim, and Jeremiah can go with me. I can spend the night at Elmwood and bring Judith back the next day.”

Agatha began to grow interested in her proposed jaunt. She was already planning the details.

Her father sat back contented. He had gained his point at last.

When supper was over, they went out into the garden together. The moon had risen and was flooding the scene with pale light. They walked up and down

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

in silence, only the light of Mr. Windom's cigar, and the reflected glow upon Agatha's dress, being clearly visible.

Far off, over the city, they could see the shells—fierce war-flowers—bursting into bloom, and disappearing into the night.

Agatha was the first to break the silence.

“Father, I thought to-day, as I stood and watched the train move off with our men on it, that we had been spared a great sorrow by not having Edward here with us. It would have broken your heart and mine too, to have had him leave us in that way.”

He did not answer. There was a dead silence except for the crunching gravel under their feet.

“There could be no sorrow keener than that loss, Agatha. It is the uncertainty that keeps it so fresh. Sometimes I feel as if I should go mad for fear that I may not see Edward again—that he may be living, and I not know it.”

He sat down on the bench beneath the magnolia trees, and pulling Agatha down beside him, they both remained there silent.

X

THE morning came dark and gloomy. Grey clouds hung threateningly across the sky, drifting down close to the earth and shutting it in. The air was warm and moist, heavy with a searching dampness.

Agatha was walking impatiently up and down the back porch. She had ordered Jeremiah to saddle her horse, Selim, and to prepare to go with her to the country. She wore a tight-fitting black cloth riding-habit, which showed off to perfection her tall, lithe figure. Her hair was tucked up under a high-crowned hat. She carried a silver-mounted whip, which she flicked against the columns as she passed to and fro.

As she glanced toward the barn, a large white-washed building on the slope of the hill, where the old negro was vigorously currying and brushing out the horse's mane, an expression of affection shone in her eyes. He had been with them as far back as she could remember, and long before that. When the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

exodus was made from Virginia into the distant South, he had been her father's body-servant. He had often told her of his experiences in those wild and unsettled days. Of how they travelled in wagons drawn by oxen; of the slow pilgrimage into the virgin country where the wild beasts howled at night about the wagons; of the first house, built high off the ground, and with steps made to draw up at night to keep the fierce panthers out. With his quaint language, and vivid descriptions, he had made a romance of it, to Agatha, one that, even when she had grown to womanhood, still held a charm and interest, for the story was built about her mother's youth. Jeremiah spoke often of her beauty and the admiration bestowed upon her in the early settling days; of their yearly pilgrimage to New Orleans, on the big white steamboat, when, at the landings, friends would bring her flowers, for the reputation of her beauty was as wide as the South itself.

One of the darkest hours in Agatha's life had been when the slaves were told that they were free. Jeremiah, crazed with the news, like the others, fled down the road with his few belongings to seek the meaning of it in the town. She and her father had been left

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

entirely alone for three days; then, early one morning, Jeremiah, with two of the women, came back. They looked crestfallen and ashamed, and said that they had returned to their home to stay where they had been well treated. Ever since that time they had remained there, obedient and faithful.

When the horses were ready, Agatha and her father walked to the gate. Selim, her saddle horse, was a proud animal, his black hair shining, his head held erect, while he pawed the soft earth excitedly, impatiently awaiting the touch of his mistress.

Mr. Windom handed Agatha a letter. It was enclosed in an elaborately embossed envelope, the glazed surface making it look like celluloid. She smiled as she took it, for she knew it was the last envelope in the house. The supply of writing materials in the town had long since given out, and there seemed no chance of replenishing it. But it was Mr. Windom's way to show his love for his sister by giving her the best that he possessed.

"Here is a letter for your Aunt Amanda," he said. "Tell her I think of her every day, and wish that we could all be together." Agatha prepared to mount Selim, but hesitated, and ran back into the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

house. Going upstairs she took from the armoire in her room an old-fashioned leather case which contained a small pearl-handled pistol. She examined it to see if it were loaded, and slipped it into the bodice of her dress.

When Jeremiah had helped her to mount her horse she turned toward her father.

“Now, remember, if anything should happen to me,” she said, smiling at the improbability of the thought, “it was you that made me go.” As she spoke, she touched Selim with the whip, and he galloped off with her proudly down the road.

Mr. Windom stood for a moment watching her, then turned back toward the house.

“May God keep her out of this town until the danger is past,” was the prayer that went up from his lips.

XI

THE shelling of the town was going on fiercely that morning. As they crossed the bridge over the bayou, letting the horses go slowly, a Parrott shell came whistling over their heads, and plunged into the bayou, throwing great sheets of water high into the air. Agatha urged Selim rapidly up the hill until she reached the quiet residence street which led out of the town. Here she drew rein a moment and looked about her. She had not been in this part of the town for more than a month, and the outlook of the whole place was changed. What had been smooth, green-terraced lawns were now but a honeycombed mass of small entrances to caves, which gave the place the look of an avenue of sepulchres.

Groups of negroes were still digging rapidly in the hard soil, while other men were standing about, superintending and giving instructions. Through the openings to the caves could be seen women and children, their pale and frightened faces showing the suspense and unhealthiness of their enforced hiding.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha walked her horse along slowly between these places, looking at them with interest, but never feeling for a moment the danger she incurred.

A girl came out of one of the caves and shading her eyes with her hand, looked toward Agatha. Then she waved her hand, beckoning to her.

Agatha rode into the yard. The fences and plank walls had disappeared in the mounds of fresh earth piled about everywhere.

“Get off, Agatha, and come in here! I want you to see my new home.”

It was her friend, Melinda, who seemed to have made herself perfectly at home in the strange surroundings. Agatha threw the reins to Jeremiah, and jumping off the horse walked up the embankment to Melinda.

“Father made us come here yesterday,” the girl told her. “A shell exploded near our kitchen and almost killed our old cook. Poor old thing, her arm had to be taken off, the wound was so bad. After that, father just made us all move out of the house directly and come to this awful hole. Just come in and look at it.”

She stooped a little and they entered the dark cave

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

A long, narrow corridor had been dug out, extending for several yards, and then broadening into a large room, twenty feet square. Rough hewn posts supported the centre of the cave, which was lighted by several lamps.

The family—the mother and four or five children—were sitting together in the centre, on a carpet which they had brought with them. Rude benches and bunks were arranged about the wall to take the place of beds. The heat of the place was oppressive.

Agatha looked around a moment, and then rushed from the cave. The feeling of suffocation was too strong for her. When they reached the open air, where they could breathe freely, she said to Melinda, who had followed her out:

“How can you stand it? I would rather risk anything than suffocate in that horrible place. I had no idea the caves were so dreadful.”

“Well,” said Melinda impatiently, “what can I do? Father says we must stay here and that settles it. I certainly couldn’t stay home all alone. I wish he could see you out riding about town as if the place were not being showered with shot. Where are you going, out to Elmwood?”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha had mounted her horse. "Yes, that's just where I'm going," she replied. Father wants me to bring back one of the girls for company. He says we have not begun to see the worst part of the war yet. I'll bring Judith back with me in the morning, and we'll stop here so that I can show her your cave. Good-bye."

She rode quickly back into the street, and soon came to a long hill, leading up to the chain that surrounded the town. They passed a group of soldiers stationed by the road, who examined her pass and let her go on.

The sun had disappeared by this time, and the sky had become dark again. A few large drops of rain fell upon the dusty road. Agatha urged her horse to his full speed. The sound of the bursting shells became less distinct as the town was left behind. They crossed a wooden bridge that spanned the railroad, their horses' hoofs making a clattering noise in the stillness of the country. They galloped down into a long valley and began the ascent on the other side, between the dug-out walls of the road. The way was familiar to Agatha; almost all the big trees that formed milestones held some association for her,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

some memory of the many journeys that she had made along that same way.

The shower stopped, so she gave Selim the rein, letting him climb the hill at his ease. At the top, they came out upon another ridge, and the horses, blowing hard from their long pull, rested a moment under a crêpe myrtle tree, fresh and beautiful in its pale pink blossoms. Selim's glossy coat was flecked with white lather and Agatha patted him on the neck, playfully telling him that he was too soft for such speed and must have more exercise.

She was pinning her hat on more securely, when suddenly there was a flash of grey before her as three men ran quickly across the road and disappeared in a dense growth of bushes in the direction of the town. "Did you see those men, Jeremiah?" she said wonderingly. He was staring straight into the bushes where they had disappeared, and nodded his head without speaking. Agatha spurred Selim forward and dashed up to the place where the men had crossed. No sign of them was to be found, except their footprints in the deep dust of the highway. She called aloud but only her own voice echoed back to her. So sudden had been their appear-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ance and departure that she felt as if she had been dreaming.

She resumed her ride slowly, wondering what it could mean. Why did not these men, evidently Confederates, keep to the road instead of flying across the country like mad? Presently she turned into a narrow, unused lane. Scarlet trumpet vines were clustering over the old, wood-rail fence that protected the meadows on either side. Wild wistaria and climbing hydrangeas made the air fragrant, and the soft, damp air came refreshingly to the horses as well as the riders.

A wide, rough gate barred the end of the lane, and above it could be seen the primitive old house, built of logs, their whitewashed sides shining clean in the surrounding grove of beach trees.

Agatha rode gaily in at the gate, which Jeremiah opened, and called loudly for some of her relations to meet her. She dismounted at the high porch, and Jeremiah and another negro led the horses away.

For a moment she stood upon the porch to shake the dust from her skirts. Before the house was a long avenue of beech trees forming a complete canopy for the stretch of velvety turf underneath.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Beyond, through the vista made by the trees, were the hills that grew from green into blue, as the distance widened. To one side lay a group of one-story houses, the former slave quarters, a little settlement by itself, now entirely deserted. On the other side was the orchard and vegetable garden.

A pleasant-looking mulatto girl appeared and told Agatha the family were all in the garden picking strawberries, so she went there to find them.

At the end of the long rows of furrowed ground, she saw three pink sunbonnets bobbing up and down, moving about among the stubby plants. Agatha walked toward them, calling her cousins by name.

The two little girls recognised her first and came running with exclamations of delight, followed by Judith, the eldest sister, whose bright pretty face showed an equal pleasure. They all wore plain calico dresses, standing out stiff with the starch of bad washing. Mrs. Wordsworth came more slowly, walking with the aid of a cane, for the rheumatism brought on by the labour and exposure of the past year caused her great suffering. Her husband had been among the first to fall in the war, and the responsibility and care of the three children rested

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

heavily on her shoulders. She had been left with three negroes after the emancipation proclamation, the twenty other slaves having gone at once, and it was almost impossible to work the large farm properly.

Agatha kissed her aunt and the girls affectionately. Their city cousin, as they called her, represented to them all that was fine and cultured in the larger world of which they knew little.

“Aunt Amanda,” said Agatha, handing her the letter, when the greetings were over, “father sent this to you. He wants you to let Judith go back with me to-morrow.”

Mrs. Wordsworth shook her head as she sat down in the summer-house and tore open the envelope.

The girls gathered about Agatha, asking her questions, begging her to tell them all about the bombardment. They had heard the noises, and at night could sometimes see the bright lights shooting through the sky. They listened breathlessly to her words, as she told them many of the details of her life in town, and when she described the caves the people were digging, they were filled with excitement. The younger ones turned to their mother and besought

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

her to let them all go back with Agatha and live in a cave.

Mrs. Wordsworth folded up the letter slowly, and sat silently looking before her with an anxious look in her eyes.

“You are going to let Judith go back with me, Aunty, aren’t you?” Agatha asked, wondering what her father had written to make his sister look so sad.

“Oh, look, it’s beginning to rain!” one of the girls exclaimed.

“Then we must go into the house at once,” said Mrs. Wordsworth, rising quickly as if glad of the opportunity to evade Agatha’s question.

The two elder girls led the way back to the house, swinging in each hand a big tin bucket filled with the bright red fruit.

Jeremiah was standing with his horse’s rein in his hand, ready to return to the town and carry any message they might wish to send.

Mrs. Wordsworth walked up to him, saying in a low tone, “Tell my brother that I will do what he wishes. You had better go at once.”

She waved him off and went into the house. The

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

girls were all sitting on the porch sheltered from the rain, and they were still putting questions to Agatha faster than she could answer.

“Oh, cousin Agatha,” said Lucy, the elder of the two little girls, “don’t you think it would be fun to live in a cave? I do wish we could.”

“Well, I don’t believe you’d like it as much as you think,” Agatha replied. “Melinda says it’s horrid. It’s damp and cold, and the lamps smell. Besides, you couldn’t run about as you do here, or feed the chickens, or anything.”

“I shouldn’t mind about the chickens,” said Judith, laughing. “If that greedy old Ruffletop doesn’t stop stealing the other chickens’ food, I know what ’ll happen to her.”

“Don’t you dare touch Ruffletop, Judith,” said Lucy indignantly. “Why, cousin Agatha, she comes running when I call her, and eats right out of my hand.”

“Yes, you’ve made her greedy—horrid old Brahmapootra.” Judith was in a teasing mood. “Most too tough for soup, I should say.”

“Judith, you’re just as mean as you can be.” Lucy’s eyes snapped as she defended her pet.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Never mind,” said Agatha, “I’ve got some red ribbon in my box that’s just the colour for two little girls I know.”

“Oh, cousin Agatha!” It was Kitty’s turn to be interested. “Our hair ribbons are a disgrace, and as for the dolls, poor things, I’m ashamed to have you see them.”

“Next time I come, I’ll bring something for them, but it won’t be much, I’m afraid.” Agatha put her arm around Kitty as she spoke and kissed the little face under the flapping sunbonnet. Both children nestled close to her, chattering like small birds. “Do tell me how the cats are,” she asked, “and are there any new kittens?”

“No, but there are lots of pigs,” said Lucy. “Kitty wanted to name one after you, but I said Agatha wasn’t a good name for a pig!”

“I should think not,” cried Judith. “Imagine Agatha grunting!” It was indeed difficult to imagine, and they all laughed.

“Why do you suppose mother won’t let me go back with you?” Judith went on. “Of course there’s lots to do here, but I do think she might when Uncle has asked me to come!”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Everything is different now, you know,” said Agatha dreamily. Her thoughts turned to the men whom she had seen running that afternoon. The incident had impressed her curiously.

XII

WHILE Agatha was telling them of her experience on the way out, Mrs. Wordsworth joined them.

Aunt Charity, their old mammy, had brought a tray of things from the kitchen, and was preparing to set the supper table when Judith exclaimed:

“See that man running, mother! Who do you suppose he is?”

A man had suddenly come into view at the end of the lawn and was running swiftly toward them. The two little girls ran into the house, frightened by his haggard and wild appearance.

He wore a grey uniform, wet in places with dark purplish spots. When he reached the steps he fell exhausted, gasping for breath.

“They have—beaten—us,” he said brokenly. “They—are—coming—this way. We tried—to hold them back—at Big—Black. Burnt the bridges—but they are—getting across—by now. Water—quick! I must get—into town—before night—to warn them.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Every nerve in his body seemed to have reached its limit. He drank the water that was handed to him in one gulp, and struggled to his feet unsteadily. "You'd better hide your silver stuff," he said. "The Yankees will be here before morning."

He pulled himself together and staggered off, falling into a run as he got back into the road.

The group of women stood as if turned to stone. Agatha ran to the gate in a stunned way. It had been an hour since Jeremiah had left. He must be at home by this time, she calculated, and it would be madness for her to go home alone at this hour. It was entirely dark now, and the rain was falling gently but steadily. As she stood undecided what to do she became aware that her aunt's arm was about her.

"Thank God, Agatha, that you are here! You can help us bear this trial. I pray that we shall not be driven out of the house."

Agatha was not listening. She was planning some way to get back to the town before it was surrounded. She could not bear to have her father there alone, and not be able to get to him.

Mrs. Wordsworth led her into the house. "You

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

must help me hide the silver at once, Agatha," she said decidedly. "We must save the little I have left."

They found the girls were running about in the wildest excitement. Judith had cleared the supper table and was placing all the silver upon it. They all began to wrap up the pieces in heavy, coarse paper.

Aunt Charity brought an old oak chest which she placed near the table. "Fur de Lawd's sake, what's you wrappin' up dat stuff fer? You ain't got time fer dat. Give it heah." She grabbed the heavy candelabra from the table, and threw them into the bottom of the box. Then she took the coffee urn and teapot, and treated them in the same way. Mrs. Wordsworth did not stop her, and presently the box was filled and the top securely nailed on. Then Judith called the negro man in from the kitchen.

"William, take this chest to the cow lot and bury it. I will show you the place," said Mrs. Wordsworth. "Come, Agatha, you can hold the umbrella, while I tell him what to do. Girls, get together whatever you need and take it upstairs, but don't lose any time. They may be here any moment."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Old Charity led the little procession, lighting the way with a flickering lantern. William followed, carrying the heavy box on his shoulder, while Mrs. Wordsworth and Agatha came close behind them. The situation was too fraught with alarm for them to see any humour in it. They walked solemnly along down the lawn, through the stable, where the cows were dozing comfortably, and finally stopped at a secluded spot.

They stood on the slippery ground, watching the negro dig the deep hole. The dim lantern light flickered upon their drawn, frightened faces, until at last the work was finished, the ground filled in, and trampled over to make it look undisturbed.

Suddenly through the mist they heard the loud call of a bugle followed by the steady marching of many feet. Charity blew out the lantern quickly, and they groped their way back to the house.

Judith rushed from the steps that led upstairs, and fled to her mother's arms.

“Oh, mother, there is a great crowd of men passing on the road. I was looking out of the window upstairs when I saw a lot of torches go by—I couldn't see very distinctly, the rain is misting so—

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

but there were men on horses and great heavy wagons. They all had grey uniforms, and were going toward the town as fast as they could. Oh, mother, do you suppose they will stop here? ”

“ No, child, it must be the retreating army hurrying into the town for safety. We needn't be afraid. They will not stop anywhere to-night.”

She spoke calmly, trying to keep the children from becoming frightened. There was a control, a dignity about her, that Agatha had never noticed before—a capacity for management—a steadiness of nerve that had its influence upon the others.

They could hear distinctly now the clamour of the retreating army. There were loud bugle calls, voices calling hoarsely in the darkness, drums beating the companies into line, and heavy artillery and wagons were crunching along the road, with a groaning noise as the wheels bore the heavy weights over the uneven places.

The incessant soft patter of the rain on the roof blended the whole group of sounds into one hurrying, throbbing, rushing tramp, tramp, tramp!

Agatha went upstairs into the low half-story room and looked out of the window for a long time. She

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

could see nothing but the twinkle of the lights as the army marched steadily by.

Mrs. Wordsworth with the girls and old Charity were in the dining room; they had put out the lights to avoid attracting attention.

The two children were already asleep with their heads in Charity's lap; and Judith was drowsing on a sofa. Mrs. Wordsworth and Agatha alone were conscious of the suspense overhanging them.

A few logs burned in the open brick fire-place, and Agatha pulled up a stool to the fire beside Mrs. Wordsworth. They gazed silently into the dying embers, the only sounds being the peaceful breathing of the children, the steady downpour of rain, and the tramp of the multitude without.

As the hours passed on, the noises grew less, until only now and then came a bugle call that sounded far-off in the distance.

Agatha sat with wide-open eyes, her mind too alert for sleep. She was planning to get back into the town, in the early morning, and felt sure that Selim could take her at all risks through the most closely guarded ground. She unconsciously twisted a large ring upon her finger as her thoughts flew on, and in

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

her abstraction it fell with a tinkling sound upon the hearth. Mrs. Wordsworth looked up and glanced at the ring as Agatha replaced it.

“It is a pity you forgot to put that in the chest. It is too handsome for the rogues to overlook. You know they are taking everyone’s jewelry.”

Agatha looked at the ring affectionately. “I don’t believe I could get along without it, Aunty. It has never been off my finger before, except when it was being enlarged. I wonder if there can be any significance in that?”

A sad expression came into her eyes.

“Yes, I know how fond you are of it,” said Mrs. Wordsworth. “I remember when your father brought home three of them with him from New Orleans one year for you and Edward and Jordan. When the boys disappeared he thought they would be clues to identify them, as he has often told you. But it never seemed to help in finding them.”

Agatha sighed and turned the ring toward the fire light. It was made of heavy gold filigree, and black enamel encircling a large piece of agate. The flat surface of the stone was carved with initials.

“I remember that dreadful day so well, Agatha,”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Mrs. Wordsworth went on. "We had been having a family reunion, and we were all in the happiest of humours. Your father came into supper late in the evening and told us that a party of gamblers had murdered a man in the town the night before, and that the citizens had finally tracked them to the cave in the hill back of your house. They were going to be forced out of the cave that night and shot down as they came out. You can imagine how excited we were! Your mother ran at once to see if you all were safe. When she came back I have never seen anyone look as despairing. Your brother Edward, and your cousin Jordan, were nowhere to be found. No one had seen them since late in the afternoon, when Jeremiah had noticed them playing in front of the cave. Of course we all knew what had happened and your father and the men went straight down to the cave. We women stayed with your mother, trying to comfort her. That look of despair never left her face, even when your father was brought back wounded; she scarcely seemed to notice it. And as you know she did not live very long."

Mrs. Wordsworth stopped.

A pale streak of grey had sifted in through the

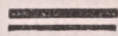
T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

closed shutters. The rain had ceased. A hushed stillness overspread the world. The chilling, ghostly hour before the daybreak had come.

Rising, she peered out between the slats of the shutter. Agatha saw her tremble a little, as if the cold air had chilled her. She noticed the fierce light that burned in her eyes as she turned around.

“Wake the children, Agatha,” she said. “They have come.”

BOOK THREE



Heart of Hope

I

THE sound of voices on the porch came to Mrs. Wordsworth as she walked out into the hall. Taking down the heavy piece of timber that barred the door, she opened it and looked out.

Three men in blue uniforms pushed their way by her hurriedly and entered.

"We are only women here," she said with calm dignity. "We are unprotected and throw ourselves upon your mercy." She stepped back a little, making way for them as they entered.

They made no reply, taking no notice of her, as they went about hurriedly, examining each room.

The house was built of logs, closely fitted together and making tight, weather-proof walls. It had been made for protection and security, not for artistic effect, and there was no inside plastering or finishing. The broad halls formed a cross, each corner a room, with two doors opening into it.

"This will do, Smith, we can use it to advantage as a hospital. Get back to the road at once and send the ambulances over here. Tell Osterhaus we

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

have found a good place for our needs. Find all the men that are used up, and get them over here out of the way. Send me all they can spare to get the place in shape. Clear the women out. Tell them they can roost upstairs.”

These orders came from one of the men, as he passed quickly from one room to another. He planned the use of each part of the house for his purposes, quickly, decidedly, showing himself to be a master in his work. His companions made no suggestions but noted and remembered orders.

As they entered the room where the girls were gathered, Agatha rose from her seat by the window, and stood waiting any remarks they might address to her. She had never known anything but courtesy from men, and it was a shock when she noticed that they did not take off their caps in the presence of women. Experience had not yet taught her that politeness is dispensed with in war.

Two of the men stared at her in astonishment. One of them touched the other's arm.

“Gad, what a beauty! Did you ever see such eyes?” he whispered to his companion.

Agatha heard him. A quick blush dyed her face,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

leaving her paler than usual. She instinctively felt for the pistol concealed in her dress. She still wore her riding habit, not having changed during the night except to leave off her hat.

“So you are preparing to leave us, my beauty,” the man said to her, noticing her dress.

Her eyes flashed at the insulting familiarity, but the remark held out a gleam of hope to her. She put aside her anger and spoke to them.

“Do you think I can get safely into town if I leave at once?” she asked, her face lighting up.

The men turned to each other and laughed.

“Well, I guess not,” said one with a grim chuckle. “Your town is surrounded by now, if it is not already in our hands. The best thing for you to do is to stay here. We don’t mind.”

Agatha sat down again, the light gone out of her face.

The men went into the adjoining room, a long bedroom which formed an arm to the square house. She could hear them talking, one giving orders to have tables brought in and the place arranged for an operating room. They with a business-like precision disposed of the opportunities the house offered.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Mrs. Wordsworth told Charity to take the girls upstairs, but they could scarcely be persuaded to leave the window where they were watching intently the busy scene in the yard.

A troop of cavalrymen had rushed in from the lane and were filling the yard rapidly. Some had dismounted and were lying on the grass, others were galloping about wildly. The fence on the side towards the road was being torn down, and a motley crowd of men were pushing their way towards the house in noisy confusion. The whole place seemed to have been crowded in one moment with a mass of bluecoats, swarming about like bees.

Depredation and wanton destruction were going on everywhere. The soldiers, half mad with their wounds and hunger, rushed about from one place to another, seeking anything they could find to eat or appropriate. They went into the smoke-house, and rolled out barrels of molasses and meal, throwing great quantities of hams and salt meat about on the ground, the barrels breaking open and the contents mixing in disgusting masses.

In the barnyard a crowd had run the chickens through with their bayonets, marching back to the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

lawn with their trophies held high in the air. Others cut off the heads of pigs with their swords. The cows were driven out of the stable and shot down without object or reason. Everyone seemed to be in a riot of excitement. The sound of the battle had not yet died in their ears. They were still following the impulses of their aroused barbaric nature.

“Guess I’ll have enough to eat for one time,” said a big fellow, with a ham under each arm.

“It takes a lot to fill up that long carcase of yours,” cried another. “But you ain’t hog enough to need two hams, now come!”

“Plenty more where those came from, partner,” was the reply. “You’re slow, that’s all,” and he hurried on with his plunder.

Yells rose above the din. Uproarious laughter came from groups breakfasting under the trees, their canteens held up to their mouths. The well, at the end of the garden, was surrounded by a jostling crowd that upset and spilled the water buckets in their attempts to get the cooling draught. Some had already begun to dig holes in the ground, searching for hidden treasures. Officers rushed about trying to control the confusion, to subdue the men into

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

a semblance of order. It was impossible, the blood had to cool in their veins before they would give way to any quieting influence.

Agatha stood at the door a moment before following Mrs. Wordsworth up the steps.

A party of men wearing gold epaulettes were standing on the porch. They were conferring about some plan, their heads close together. A sentence arrested Agatha's attention as she stepped to the door.

"Can't do it, sir, my horse is fagged out, and I don't know where to find another. Matthewson has gone to see if there is anything here I can ride."

Agatha felt as if her heart had stopped beating. A weak feeling of utter dejection crept upon her. The certainty that Selim would be found made her almost faint.

"By Jove, look what the fellow has found," cried the man with the epaulettes.

He spoke with a thick German accent, his florid face and light hair indicating his nationality.

Agatha followed with her eyes in the direction in which he pointed, and her fears were realised. A man

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

led Selim slowly through the crowd, winding in and out among the groups under the trees.

The horse was looking handsomer than ever, his glossy coat shining brightly in the sun.

Agatha's eyes opened wide as she looked at the man leading the horse up to the group of men. He was tall and slender, and carried his head thrown back a little as if proud of the service he was performing for his commander. His face was familiar to her. Where had she seen him before?

Agatha waited a moment and then ran swiftly down the steps to the horse. She took hold of the bridle, the horse rubbed his head against her, nickering happily.

The man still held the other side of the bridle, and they stood this way for a few moments, looking steadily at each other.

The crowd on the porch had stopped talking and a few of the soldiers had come up and stood in groups watching the outcome. They thought there would be a scene—some hot words they felt sure. The girl's bearing and face showed her determination.

Agatha broke the silence.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“This is my horse. What are you going to do with him?” The man was still looking at her steadily. She felt that his eyes were burning her face. She saw sorrow and a deep pity in them. When he had spoken, he looked towards the group on the porch. The general nodded his head.

“I was ordered to bring this horse to the general,” he motioned towards the porch.

Agatha's breath was coming hard.

“Then you steal when you are commanded. You—thief!”

A dark flush came into his face. She could see the teeth sink into his lip.

“I obey orders when I am commanded.”

His voice was firm and cold. In accent it recalled something to her which she could not place. The group on the porch grew impatient. Everything had been too quiet to suit them. They had expected a scene, but this was only a man and woman talking without excitement. A jeering laugh came from the crowd.

“And that man is going to take him?” Agatha's voice sounded dull and hollow. The hope had gone out of it. “Yes,” the man replied. “Will you move,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

please?" She thought she had detected a look of sympathy in his eyes, but his voice convinced her that she was mistaken. She looked at the crowd. Not one face spoke encouragement.

She put her arm around the horse's neck and gently pulling his head down, kissed him.

At the same time a sharp report rang out. Selim knelt down quietly, and lying comfortably out on the ground, stretched his neck until his head touched Agatha's feet. The men on the porch ran towards them, the soldiers gathered about closely, shutting in Agatha and the man with a ring of infuriated faces.

"Take the pistol away from her," they yelled. "Run her into the house. Down with the rebel."

The girl stood dazed. The thought of killing Selim had come to her as a last resort, and in the same moment she had pulled the pistol from her dress and pressed the trigger. Jeremiah had once told her the spot that would kill a horse instantly and now she remembered it. It seemed to her an age before the horse fell. She felt that he would never reach the ground and lie still. The excited talk of the men around her seemed a thousand miles away. She looked

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

around blindly, seeing nothing but the man's sympathetic look, as he stood beside her pushing back the crowd.

"Better give me the pistol now. I will bring it back to you," he whispered to her.

A little nervous laugh escaped her.

"I swear it," he said quietly. He took the pistol from her unresisting hand and slipped it into his hip pocket. Then, taking her by the arm, he urged her along towards the house. He led her to the door that opened into the enclosed staircase, leading upstairs. She stumbled into the dark passage and he closed the door after her.

"Lock it, Matthewson," an officer called to him. "We've got a dangerous lot of rebels here evidently. Keep your eyes on them and don't let them come down from up there for any consideration."

The young man received his orders with apparent indifference. Then he walked down into the swarming crowd of soldiers, his head held high above them.

An expression of loathing had come into his eyes.

II

HOW Agatha got to her room she never remembered. The steps had been to her a black precipice, which she climbed for years before she reached the top, and away off somewhere she found a bed and fell across it. She lay there staring steadily up at the ceiling and mechanically counting the stars on the crude wall paper over and over again. Finally her strained nerves snapped and the tears came.

She remained there all day, sobbing softly to herself. The children came and begged her to talk to them, but she never seemed aware of their presence. Judith and Mrs. Wordsworth also tried to calm her, but they soon saw that the tears would be better for her, so they left her alone.

The mingled noises from the yard came to her in her half-conscious state, like the roar of a waterfall, drowsy, sleep-giving, in its steady sound. She thought of nothing, her mind seemed a blank.

Towards the late afternoon she thought she had

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

been asleep. A deep moaning sound seemed to be surrounding her. She believed it was a dream, caused by the nervous state she was in. But it kept up, insistently penetrating her very being.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and looked about her. She realised at once that she had not been asleep. The moaning still came to her through the open window. Another sound had been added to it. In a higher key a shrill cry was heard above the long moan. She raised herself in the bed and listened. It seemed to be increased. She got up and walked unsteadily to the window.

At first, when she looked out, she put her hands over her face with an exclamation of horror, but an irresistible fascination made her drop them again.

A long row of men were propped up against the house. They seemed helpless and unable to move. Their faces were blackened and running with blood. One man was sitting bolt upright, with both legs gone above the knee. Where they had been was a mass of torn cloth and bleeding flesh. Another had torn his shirt entirely away, the blood gushing from a wound in his breast. And the others all down the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

line, were in like condition; some in their agony writhing about on the ground, twisting themselves into queer, unnatural postures.

A row of wagons was coming slowly into the yard where the gate had formerly been. When they reached the house, four soldiers stood ready to help the men out.

The beds of the wagons were piled high with the bodies of the wounded. They had been thrown in, regardless of their suffering. Shrieks and curses came from them, as they were dragged out and placed on the ground. The men handling them had lost all thought of care and sympathy in their routine work. It was to them their daily task, to be done to-day, to-morrow and so on until the war was ended. They felt that they had no time to save a man pain, who would probably die in a few hours anyhow.

Where the wagons had stopped the ground had become covered with slippery, clotted blood. Strange words came to Agatha, as she stood spellbound looking down on the scene.

“Ruin, desolation, death,” kept ringing in her ears, and she unconsciously put her hands up to

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

shut out the sound. With an effort, she pulled herself away from the window.

When she looked back in the room, a man was standing just inside the door. His face was red and coarse, with a leering smile, which displayed broken blackened teeth. The glassy eyes showed him to be under the influence of liquor. Tobacco and dark red spots covered his soiled blue clothes. He was advancing carefully towards Agatha, walking slowly to keep from falling.

She felt for her pistol. Then she remembered the scene of the morning. The loss of her pistol came back to her with a sudden force. For the first time in her life an uncontrollable fear took possession of her. Her knees began to give way, and she thought she was going to fall. She tried to plan some way to ward the man off, to protect herself. Her voice refused to come when she attempted to speak.

“What do you want?” She gasped at last.

The horrible smile was still on his face. He kept his eyes fixed on her hands. At last he spoke in a thick, maudlin voice.

“Gimme that ring you had on this morning. There it is.” He pointed gleefully to her finger.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

"No, you cannot have it," she answered firmly, her voice coming back to her.

"By God, I will have it," he muttered.

With a quick movement she placed herself behind a table, and retreated into a corner, pulling the piece of furniture before her. The man followed, and leaned across the table. "I guess I will have it," he kept muttering to himself.

She stood steadily with her back to the wall, her eyes glued upon the man in a fascinated stare. He hesitated a moment, then she saw him put his hand back to his hip pocket. She knew what that meant, and that he would not hesitate to do it. Taking her hands from behind her, she loosened the ring, and held it out to him in her palm.

A shadow darkened the doorway and another man advanced into the room. She jerked back her hand suddenly, and the drunken man drew the pistol out of his pocket. But his arm did not raise. A firm hand grasped it from behind and held it steadily down.

Agatha recognised the soldier who had taken her pistol from her. He took the drunken man firmly by the shoulders and shoving him swiftly out of the room, pushed him headlong down the stairs. When

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the noise of falling ceased he returned to the room.

Agatha had fallen limply into a chair.

She sat there looking vacantly up at him, her hands lying clasped in her lap. Her white face showed the strain she had undergone. Dark circles were beneath her eyes and a drawn look about her mouth. She looked as if something would snap in a moment and let the overtaxed machine fall asunder.

The man held out the pearl-handled pistol to her. She made no effort to take it as he laid it on the table. Her ring slipped from her hand and rolled to the floor. He stooped and picked it up, looking at it curiously. He turned it over and over, noticing the initials engraved in the stone. Unconsciously, he put his hand to his breast, as if feeling for something. After a while he placed the ring back upon Agatha's unresisting finger and stood looking at her. The moaning sound still came through the window, her imagination conjuring up more awful things than the real scene had shown her.

"I am very sorry for you," the man said. The deep tones of sympathy vibrated in his voice. "Is there nothing I can do for you?"

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha still looked up at him helplessly.

“Only get me home. I shall go mad if I stay here.”

Her voice was that of a weak child.

He shook his head gloomily.

“I am afraid that is impossible, but I will try, I will do my best.”

He stepped forward quickly to catch her. She had fallen from the chair to the floor.

III

AS the night came on the heavy atmosphere of the little rooms upstairs became suffocating. Outside in the yard the ground still steamed with the heat that followed the rain. Disagreeable odours began to fill the air. Big fires had been built, the men standing and sitting about them in groups eating. Lanterns had been hung on the trees and shed a dim light on the still foliage. In the shadows men were lying about on their blankets; some with their backs against trees and their caps pulled down over their faces, sleeping as soundly as if in bed.

A large ditch had been dug near the end of the house, and a long procession of men walked from the house to the ditch and back again. They carried boxes, filled with blood-soaked rags and bandages from the operating room. These they threw into the opening.

The odour of smoking fires hung low over the place. It seemed impossible to get away from it. The

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

moaning was insistent in its continuity, broken now and then by a staccato shriek.

Mrs. Wordsworth sat beside the children, in the cramped low-ceiled room. The house had become permeated with the odour of chloroform from the rooms below. The heat and moisture had brought flies and mosquitoes into the house in a swarm. The two little girls were lying upon the rough bed, tossing restlessly in slumber, while Mrs. Wordsworth fanned them with a large palmetto fan, and Charity stumbled about trying to drive out some of the flies.

They had undressed Agatha, when she fainted, and put her to bed, where she now lay sleeping beside Judith. A constant noise disturbed them, an irregular moving about and shuffling of feet, which made sleep almost impossible.

With the first grey of dawn Judith got up and went to the window. A blood red sun rose from the hills, and in a few moments the certainty of blistering heat was added to the already complete horror.

Judith dipped a towel in a jug of water and gently moistened Agatha's face. The cool cloth refreshed her, and she opened her eyes, smiling at Judith.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

But as she awakened came the awful remembrance, and she buried her face in her hands and shuddered. Presently she got up and bathed her face in the tin basin. Feeling calmed and strengthened, she straightened herself resolutely. If this horror had to be gone through she determined to be strong enough to battle with it. She had seen the worst, for nothing could be more horrible than that line of wounded men. She shuddered again as the picture came back to her, but the hope of getting back home gave her courage.

Having dressed herself with composure and energy, she stood by the window to comb her hair, and looked down into the yard, at the slumbering army.

A man was walking about between the groups, with a bucket of water, and as the men called to him he would stop and hand them a dipper of the refreshing draught.

As Agatha looked about her, the sight seemed one that she had always looked upon. Every little detail seemed familiar, and the one day's horror seemed to have blotted out every other memory. Even the moaning of the wounded came to her now

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

as a sound she had always heard. It was the voice of her confidant, the river, that she had never understood. It was suffering. It was "ruin, desolation, death."

She turned away and spoke to Judith, who had brought her one of her white frocks.

"It will be so much cooler, Agatha," Judith said, "And even if it does not fit, what difference does it make?"

Agatha willingly accepted the suggestion, and she and Judith struggled a long time with the frock. It was entirely too small for Agatha, and when she had forced her arms into the sleeves, and pinned it together in the back, they both laughed at her absurd appearance.

Their merriment jarred upon Mrs. Wordsworth and brought her to the door in wide-eyed astonishment. But when she looked at her niece, and found her recovered enough to be up and dressed, she smiled, marvelling at the recuperative power of youth.

With the sun, came the *reveillé*, and the army woke. The roar of many voices rose again, the din of rattling cans, the loud calls, and the crackling sound of fires.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Old Charity had gone to the well for water, and returned, with many stories of what she had seen. She talked on in great excitement, until a sudden thought stopped her.

“Lord, missus,” she said, holding up her hands, “we aint got a bit of vittles for breakfast.”

Mrs. Wordsworth rose, in consternation.

“What are we going to do?” she said, looking about her helplessly.

“I tell you,” the old negro said, “dar’s a man down in de smoke-house, what is handin’ out things to all de men. Why won’t he hand dem out to me, too, if I goes dar just like dem others? I asked one of de men who he wuz, and he told me he wuz the com-serry. Dat is egzactly what he called him.”

Mrs. Wordsworth thought over the situation, and then said, “I can’t see but one thing for us to do, and that is to ask the commander in charge here to give us food. They surely will not starve us. I wonder which of us had better go?” She looked to Agatha and Judith for assistance.

Agatha felt that this opportunity might help her to form some plan of escape and her hopes rose.

“I will go, aunty,” she said quickly. She feared

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

that Mrs. Wordsworth would object. "I feel all right now, and I am not afraid to face all of them."

Her aunt considered the matter for a long time. It seemed to her the most sensible plan. Judith was not brave enough, and it was best for her to be with the children. The duty seemed to devolve upon Agatha.

"Better take Aunt Charity with you, Agatha. She will be a great protection, I am sure, and will know where to lead you."

The negro stood up with alacrity and prepared to go at once.

"Lend me your sunbonnet, Judith," said Agatha, impatient to be off. "And Aunt Charity, be sure to take two baskets to bring back what we need."

"Lordy, chile, dar aint no baskets here, but I'll git you sumthin'."

She went to the bed and pulled the linen cover off the bolster; wrapping it into a bundle she put it under her arm. "Now, we's ready," she said, leading the way down the steps in true soldier fashion.

Agatha kissed them all, and went lightly down the steps. She stopped at the bottom while Charity called a man from the porch to them.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“We are in need of food. Please tell me who I am to ask for it?” the girl said.

He pointed to the door opposite, and without saying a word returned to the porch.

Agatha crossed the hall quickly and knocked at the door. A loud voice answered, “Come in,” and she opened the door, leaving it ajar behind her as she entered.

A man sat at a table in the middle of the room. She remembered him as the one with epaulettes who had instituted the search for the horse.

The table was covered with papers, and small pencilled maps. Above the fireplace, on the wall, was a rough diagram of the surrounding country, the situation of the town and the river.

The man looked up as she entered, and grunted with satisfaction. She noticed a glitter of humour in his light-grey eyes. He leaned back in his chair and waited for her to speak.

“We are in need of food. Will you give it to us?”

Her voice shook a little as she began.

“So you have come a-begging, hey?” He rubbed his hands together in a pleased way. “What would



“ROBBING YOU?” SHE ANSWERED QUICKLY, HER ANGER RISING INSTANTLY.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

you do if I should say no? Wouldn't you think it was only getting even with you for robbing me of that horse yesterday?"

"Robbing *you*?" she answered quickly, her anger rising instantly. She controlled herself in a moment, and stood waiting silently.

"Nothing to say to that, have you?" he began again.

She looked calmly out of the window, and waited for him to finish. The dignity of her bearing impressed him.

He drew some blank paper towards him and began to write.

"How many of you are there?" he asked, without looking up.

"Six, counting the darkey."

Agatha was standing before the drawing on the wall, studying it carefully. There were two striking errors in it, and she knew at once that it had been drawn mostly from surmise. She was so intent upon it that she did not know that the man had finished writing and was watching her closely.

"You are familiar with it, are you?" he said, looking at the drawing.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Yes, but it is not correct here. This road——”
She broke off suddenly.

The man had risen, and was standing beside her.

“Where is it wrong?” he demanded harshly.

Agatha closed her lips tightly and looked him squarely in the eyes. He returned her gaze, then impatiently shrugging his shoulders, sat down again at the table holding the paper he had written in his hand.

“You will not get this order for provisions until you tell me,” he said, a note of anger in his voice.

Agatha came up to the table and rested her hand upon it.

“Is that your opinion of Confederates?” she said.
“I’d starve before I would tell you!”

The man could not keep from showing his admiration for the girl. He handed her the order, smiling. She took the slip of paper which read “Give to bearer enough provisions to last a destitute rebel family two days.”

“You have made a mistake,” Agatha said, placing the paper in front of him again. “You should have written ‘A robbed Confederate family’ in place of the other.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The man's eyes sparkled. He enjoyed her spirit. Taking up the pen, he scratched out the words "two days," and wrote "one week" in their place. Then he rose and gave her the order.

"Let me tell you before you go, that I think you are a brave girl. I have a daughter at home that I would like to be just like you. Won't you give me your hand? You are a foe worth having." And he held out his hand as he finished speaking.

Agatha drew away from him slightly.

"No, I can't give you my hand. You don't know how much more it means to us than to you."

He turned away with a shrug and Agatha went out of the room, closing the door after her.

IV

“I HAVE the order, Charity. Where is the commissary? Do you know?”

Charity pointed to the smoke-house, at the other end of the lawn beyond the avenue of elms. Agatha stopped. It was a greater trial than she had expected, to walk down there among the soldiers, so close to the horrible sights that she had only seen from a distance before. She drew the sunbonnet well over her face and urged Charity to walk rapidly.

They went straight down from the house under the great trees. On each side of them were two long rows of cots arranged as comfortably as possible for the wounded soldiers. The heavy foliage above formed a canopy to protect them from the heat and rain. It was like a long ward in a hospital, and to Agatha the line seemed interminable.

When she raised her head and looked about her, she could see scarred faces with miserable eyes staring at her. She pulled the bonnet closer and hurried on.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

A few soldiers were standing at the smoke-house arguing over what they had received for breakfast.

"They had that stuff in the Revolution," said one. "Good thing my teeth are strong."

"Your teeth ain't the only thing in this camp that's strong," said another with a sniff of disgust. "God, I wish I was home." Then seeing Agatha he nudged his companions, whispering, "Say, there's the girl that shot the horse; she's a Johnny Reb for sure, ain't she?" And as they all laughed uproariously, one of them whistled a few bars of a well-known camp song.

Agatha held Charity back for a moment waiting for them to finish. Then she went in, and presented her order to the commissary.

He was clad only in a torn undershirt and trousers and looked amazed when Agatha came in. The room was fearful in its heat and closeness and the smell of rank food permeated the place.

The man turned indifferently, and began weighing out some flour.

"What are you going to carry it in?" He asked the question of Charity, who was standing by, watching him closely. She proudly unrolled the bolster

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

cover and began to tie one of the ruffled ends with a heavy cord.

“We’s gwine pack dem vittles in dis heah bag,” she began proudly. “Now you, sir, puts de flour heah fust.”

She indicated the tied-up end.

The flour was poured into it, Agatha holding the ends well apart to keep the precious food from being wasted.

Charity tied a heavy cord above the flour, making it a separate division from the rest.

“Now, suh,” she said, when she had finished, “you puts de meal heah.”

The meal was then poured into the compartment already prepared for it. The man smiled at the ingenuity of the old darkey, and began to cut off a piece of salt meat. Old Charity stood up and watched him as he portioned this important part of the supplies.

“Lawd bress yer, man,” she said, noticing the meat did not have a strip of lean in it. “Yer ain’t gwine gib dat stuff ter white folks, is yer? Dat’s what us niggers libs on, down heah.”

“Then it’s good enough for them, old lady,” he

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

said, nodding towards Agatha, who turned and walked towards the door, leaving Charity to superintend the remainder of the provisions.

A measure of coarse beans was put in after the meat and tied up. Then some sugar, and at the end, in a very small compartment, was a little coffee, which Charity had begged from the man for herself.

The precious article had not been on the order. The old woman looked carefully over her strange bundle. She tugged at it, but could not lift it, and the man stood by, laughing.

“Seems as if you’ve got more than you could carry,” he said aggravatingly.

“Miss Agathy, you’ll have to help me.” Charity turned to her in a shamefaced way. “I can’t pack dis by myself. Ketch er holt ob dat end please.”

She pointed to the lighter end, and Agatha picked it up.

The bundle was very heavy, and they went slowly out of the door. A group of men standing near began to laugh when they saw the two women struggling with the queer-looking bundle. One of them called out jokingly, “Lady, can’t I carry your caterpillar for you?”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha and Charity walked on faster. The jokes and laughter of the men irritated Agatha, and the bundle seemed to grow heavier and heavier at every step.

“I shall have to stop a few minutes by the well, Charity,” said the girl. “If we rest a little, I think I can go all the way to the house without stopping.”

They came to the well, which had a boxed frame about it once covered with a vine. The soldiers had torn this off in their mad efforts to get at the water, and the place looked dirty and neglected. Agatha leaned over and looked down into its depths. The water was quite low, and only near the bottom could she catch a glimmer of the reflected sky.

It was shady here, and she sat down, glad to be protected from the blistering rays of the sun. She hated the thought of going back to the house, to the awful heat, to the horrible, penetrating odours.

Charity sat down a little way off, keeping one hand tightly closed on her valuable package.

Two men came across the yard back of them towards the well. One carried a large wooden bucket on his arm.

They both hesitated on seeing Agatha, for

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

although her face was hidden by the sunbonnet, they knew it must be someone from the house. She was sitting on the bundle of rope with which the water was drawn. They stood still for a moment waiting for her to move, but as she remained unconscious of their presence the taller man stepped forward, and coughed.

Agatha started up, the sunbonnet falling back from her face as she rose.

“Oh, it’s you,” she exclaimed, recognising her friend of the day before.

“Yes,” he replied, picking up the rope from the ground. “You seem to be stronger to-day. You don’t remember fainting while I was talking to you, do you?”

He looked at her earnestly as he spoke.

His face was long and angular, the black eyes set deep under a high, broad forehead, from which his hair was brushed off carelessly, in a long black wave. His skin was tanned a deep brown, the rich reddish colour brought by exposure to the wind, but underneath could be detected the naturally pale complexion.

He wore a fresh white shirt, open at the throat, and no coat. As he stood there before her slightly

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

smiling, she could see his strong, white teeth shining in the sunlight. The thought came to her again that she had seen him before. There was something familiar in his appearance, but she was unable to tell exactly what.

As she looked beyond him to the man who had come up with him, this impression grew into a certainty.

The second man was a reflection of the first, although his hair was light, his complexion rosy and white, and his eyes a clear, clean blue. He looked younger and fresher for impressions than the other. His face was a little weak, but there was a tender expression in his eyes, a sweet look about the corners of his mouth.

She wondered why he had ever gone to war. He seemed as much out of place there as herself.

The older man lowered the bucket into the well and began to pull it slowly up. Agatha put her hand on the wooden frame and watched it rise. She was beginning to feel discouraged because he had not already spoken of his promise. What if he had forgotten it!

He pulled the bucket up and placed it on the ground without speaking.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The younger man had gone over to question Charity, listening with amusement to her replies. His clear, boyish laugh came to Agatha as she silently waited by the well.

“Come over here, Silas, and hear this old aunty talk.” His voice was soft and musical like a girl’s. “She has the funniest way of carrying provisions that I ever saw. Just look. It is like a great big snake.”

“Is it yours?” the man beside Agatha asked, pointing towards the bundle.

“Yes,” she answered, smiling at the ridiculous sight.

“One of the soldiers called it a caterpillar and it does look like one. We were carrying it back to the house and stopped here to rest.”

He started towards the bundle.

“Then my brother and I will carry it for you,” he said. “Get hold of the other end, Nathan, and let us take it to the house.”

They picked the bundle up lightly, and carried it as if it weighed nothing.

Agatha and Charity followed, passing again through the rows of wounded. The man was still

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

walking up and down with the pail of water, handing out the dipper from cot to cot.

The two men entered the house and did not stop until they had deposited the bundle upstairs. Mrs. Wordsworth and Judith were frightened when they came into the room, but they both began to laugh when they saw the stuffed bolster case.

When Agatha came up the steps, the two men stood aside to let her pass and then left the room. She looked keenly at the elder brother and followed him downstairs a little way. The younger man had gone ahead, and they were alone for a moment.

“Have you forgotten your promise?” she asked eagerly. She held her breath as she waited for his answer.

“No,” he replied softly. “Come to the well this afternoon about sundown. I will tell you then what I can do.”

V

AGATHA counted the hours of the long day, impatiently awaiting the time that was to mean so much to her. Her hopes clung tenaciously to the few words that the man had said. Evidently he had not forgotten; he was planning some way of taking her home.

The desire to be with her father became more and more importunate, and the hope of fulfilling it gave her new strength to meet her present trials.

Accordingly she devoted herself to amusing the children, and to cheering Mrs. Wordsworth and Judith.

The heat was becoming almost unbearable and the danger of infection from mosquitoes and flies began to cause them great anxiety. The children especially suffered from these pests and from the poor and insufficient food.

To add to the horror of the situation, the soldiers had begun to dig a long trench at one side of the yard, and were throwing the dead bodies of the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

wounded into it, as fast as they died. No time was even allowed for the bodies to cool. Their empty places were too badly needed to wait.

In the afternoon Agatha went softly downstairs and looked out into the hall. Everything seemed to be quiet. The officers who had taken possession of the rooms below stairs had gone on a reconnoitring expedition. Those that remained were either out of the house or asleep in their rooms. Even the operating room was silent for the first time since the soldiers had arrived.

Many of the soldiers had been ordered nearer the town, and the rest had calmed down to the routine of camp life. The house was now a hospital, with one regiment as guard, awaiting further orders.

Agatha came out on the porch and sat there for a long time, undisturbed, except for one man, who came up and sat down on the steps a little way from her. His arm had been shot off at the shoulder, and he was so tortured by flies that he rose and walked away. She could see him, moving about from place to place, vainly seeking relief from their irritating persistence.

Agatha looked at the bright sky several times im-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

patiently. He had said meet him at sunset. The sun always seemed to be in the same spot, hung in the sky like a red demon. She sat down again and waited. Could it be possible, she thought, that only two days had elapsed since she had left her home? It seemed to her a lifetime. She wondered if she had changed; if the mental metamorphosis showed in her face. She got up, at the thought, and walked into the hall, where she knew a mirror hung. She looked into it intently, for a long time.

Yes, there was a change. There was a new look in her eyes. The expression had changed from softness to an unfathomable depth. Everything that had happened in her life, everything that was to happen, seemed to lie within her eyes. Experience and character were showing themselves. The dormant soul had awakened, and was influencing her body.

As she gazed at her own reflection the past came up before her in its simple nothingness. Her hemmed-in life, her childish experiences, all appeared to her as they really were.

The memory of her relationship with Robert sickened her. It seemed so weak to have imagined that she had felt deeply. This facing of death, this

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

overwhelming insight into the depths of suffering and despair had warped her sense of valuation, as it were. She was looking about her through glasses that gave a distorted perspective.

When she returned to the porch the trees were casting long shadows on the ground. The flatness of the scene which meant that the sun was still high had disappeared, and mingling with the shadows were long shafts of strong red light.

She knew that the appointed hour had come, and taking up the tin pail which she had brought with her as an excuse, she made her way down the lawn towards the well. She passed through the long line of cots again, but this time she kept her head high, and looked before her, beyond these helpless, spent, human creatures, to the purple hills.

She reached the well breathless. There was no one there. She waited a little while, and then began to lower the bucket slowly, letting the rope out to its full length, and waiting to hear the splash that would tell her the pail was in the water. She looked over, and peered down into the black depths. There was no reflected sky there now. The well had been exhausted. There was no more water.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

She rested a moment, looking around her, before pulling up the empty bucket.

Two men were standing beside a cot that had been drawn a little way from the others, where the sounds of talking and moaning were less disturbing. She recognised the men and wondered why one of them had not come to her. She thought he must have seen her come through the yard, yet he took no notice of her as she waited there.

She sat down, resting against the wood frame. In a little while he came running towards her. She could see that he was pale under the tan. There was a miserable expression in his eyes when he spoke to her. "Give me the bucket of water, quick. A man is dying and he calls for water all the time and our pail is empty." He spoke hurriedly, and began drawing the bucket up from the well.

"There is no water," Agatha said, "the well is empty."

He let go the rope, exclaiming: "My God, is there no other place to get it?"

He looked around the yard helplessly.

"The pond." The girl pointed towards the pasture.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“That place where the soldiers bathe,” he frowned at the thought.

Agatha hesitated a moment.

“There is a jug in my room,” she said slowly, as if undecided whether to offer it.

He looked at her pleadingly. She knew that he would not ask her for it.

“The man is dying,” he said simply.

“I will bring it to you,” she said decidedly, and hurried towards the house.

She hated herself for having hesitated. A thousand ideas had rushed through her mind at the thought of giving away the last of the water in the house. A scene of intense suffering rose before her, where the sun was burning up the earth, and men and beasts cried aloud for water.

When she returned to the well the man had gone back to the cot. He seemed to be holding down the body that strove to rise. Raising his hand, he beckoned to her to bring the water to him. On receiving the jug of water from her hand, he poured the water into a tin cup, and held it to the dying man's lips. He drank it at one gulp, and opening his eyes slowly, stared around with an unintelligent

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

expression. His face was a dull putty colour, the lines and sunken places having taken on a bluish tinge. The skin looked pinched and bruised. There was a muscular contraction that kept his features moving constantly.

His roving glance fell upon the girl, and remained steadily there. A semblance of a smile hovered about his mouth. She seemed to recall something pleasant to him, and he made an effort to speak to her. She drew back a little and shuddered.

The man standing beside her took her arm in a firm grasp, as if to detain her.

“Try and do it,” he said pleadingly. “He wants to speak to you. You are a woman and it will be such a comfort to him.”

Agatha nerved herself and went nearer. It was a disgusting sight, but the hope that she might be giving the suffering man one moment of pleasure gave her strength.

She sat down on a box beside the cot, and looked up for a moment at the beautiful canopy of leaves, rustling peacefully in the light breeze, then down again at the mutilated human being beside her.

The dying soldier put out his hand and touched

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

hers. She took his hand and held it gently; the damp, clammy feeling went to her marrow.

“I’m so glad—you came—Mary. Did—they—tell you I—I—was dying?”

His words came in long-drawn-out monosyllables. His eyes wandered about in uncontrolled movements.

The young man on the other side of the cot had buried his face in the coarse blanket, and was sobbing. His bright hair shone golden against the dull grey of the covering.

Agatha did not speak. She placed her hand upon the feverish brow, and pushed back the moist hair. She tried to keep from looking at him. She was afraid he might read the horror in her eyes.

“I’m so glad you’ve come,” he rambled on in an aimless fashion. “It’s pretty here, ain’t it? And it’s so green up there. It was so red yesterday. Don’t let it get red—again—I—hate red.”

She raised the cup to his lips, as he began to moan again.

“I haven’t seen anything but that burning light for so long. It’s more—peaceful—now.”

Suddenly the quiet expression gave way to a writhing contortion. He pushed himself up on the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

cot, and sat staring straight before him. His shirt fell open, showing his bare breast. It looked as if it had been gnawed by wolves.

"I see it coming again." His voice cried out in agony. "It's red—red—red."

He sat bolt upright for a few seconds longer, then became perfectly still. He was dead.

The man beside Agatha leaned over, and lowered the body easily to the cot. She sat looking at him miserably, the dumb terror in her eyes.

Kneeling down quickly in front of her, he took both her hands in his own.

"God! That a girl like you should have seen all this." Several minutes passed. She felt a strong electric current passing from his hands to hers. His strength was sustaining her until she regained control of herself.

Presently she rose, and they walked together towards the well, the man steadying her with his hand upon her arm, both silent. Agatha longed for rest—a rest that would help her to think out the meaning of it all.

A party of men came quickly to the cot of the dead man, and bore the body off toward the ditch.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The only follower was the golden-haired soldier, who walked behind with uncovered head.

“That you should have seen such sights,” the man beside Agatha repeated. His wore an expression almost paternal.

“It was that thought which made me want to help you from the first. I decided to get you away from here the morning you came running out of the house to protect your horse.”

Agatha was just beginning to realise what he was saying.

“The only thing that delayed me was the danger to you. Are you willing to risk it? Is it worth your while?”

Agatha nodded. “Indeed it is.”

The man drew close to her and spoke rapidly.

“I am on guard to-night behind the house. Come out on the roof of the back porch and I will have a ladder ready for you. We shall have to avoid the road on account of the camps. Wear something white with a cloak over it, so that when we get near the guards at the town, they will see it and know that you are a woman. I will take you to the Confederate line. Can you get through?”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha listened intently, noting his instructions carefully.

“Yes, I can get through. When shall I be ready?”

“When you hear the midnight call?”

Agatha rose.

“Why are you doing this?” She turned and looked at him keenly.

“I have told you,” he replied quietly, returning her gaze.

“But you are risking your life for me.”

He laughed—a harsh, short laugh.

“I’m doing that every day for no one. It’s certainly better to do it for someone.”

Agatha picked up the empty bucket and started toward the house.

“What if anything should prevent you?” she said.

“There will be nothing,” he answered firmly.

The party of cavalymen had just returned, and the yard was filled with horses, crowding about the house, as their riders dismounted. The soldiers seemed to be in great excitement, and spoke in loud strident tones, as if disagreeing violently.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha walked to the porch and passed unnoticed through the crowded hall.

As she went up the steps she heard a man say, "It's the most wonderful situation I have ever seen. There is no possible way of taking the town except by a siege."

VI

DARKNESS closed in about the house. The slight breeze that had blown fitfully during the day died down into a still, palpitating closeness. The lanterns on the trees had been lighted, and shone faintly on the man with the water bucket as he went ceaselessly in and out between the cots. The bright lights streaming from the officers' rooms gradually went out, one by one, until the darkness penetrated every corner of the house.

The heavy breathing of a soldier came from one of the rooms on the lower floor, making a queer, wheezing noise.

Agatha sat at the window and looked out into the blackness. She had put on the white dress Judith had loaned her, and a long, black cloak rested on the chair near her. She had said nothing to her relatives about her expedition. She knew that they would not understand that her father needed her more than they did, but she felt conscience-stricken at leaving them. The remark she had heard had given her a clue to conditions in the town. Plans for a

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

siege were evidently being formed, and she knew that her father would be exposed to all kinds of danger.

Eleven o'clock was called by the sentries in a dismal chant.

She then threw the long cloak around her, and passed softly into the little hall, stopping a moment to listen. Then she tiptoed carefully by her aunt's door to the room where the children slept, guarded by the old negress. Charity was dozing comfortably in a rocking chair beside the bed, still automatically moving a large turkey-feather fan over the two little girls as they slept. As Agatha passed through the room to reach the roof of the porch, a plank creaked. She paused again but no one stirred, and she soon reached the window. Then she climbed softly out, the dry shingles crackling under her feet as she touched them. The black cloak hid her white gown completely and she sat there a long time, staring into the blank, meaningless darkness.

As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she could see the top of a ladder projecting just above the roof. She let herself slide slowly down to it, to

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

be ready at the moment of the midnight call. The intense stillness was broken in the far-off distance by a faint hail that grew into a resounding call, full of promise to her as it reached a man standing a few yards away down in the blackness. The firm, steady voice sent it to another sentry, and as the tones beat into Agatha's consciousness, her heart throbbed with a new hope.

The signal given, she began to descend the ladder. When she touched the ground, she looked carefully around her and then ran swiftly to the fence.

"Here I am," the steady voice whispered.

She had gone a few yards beyond him. He came up to her quickly, and took hold of her arm.

"Run for that line of bushes over there," he said, pointing to a dark mass beyond the fence.

"The watch changes now, so I shall be with you in a moment. Go as far as you can, so that we shall not be heard."

He released her arm, and she ran out into the darkness. She went straight ahead, her feet tangling in the thick wild undergrowth, until she reached a clear space on the rise of the little hill. There she sat and rested, her heart pounding with the effort.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The sentinel was still walking steadily over his guarded line. No sign of impatience showed in his bearing. Presently the sound of footsteps told him his waiting was at an end.

"You are late, Nathan. You should not have kept me waiting. Here, take the gun."

"Has the girl come?" asked the other.

"Yes, she is over there by the bushes. It was not safe for her to wait here."

He held out his hand to Nathan, who took it, in a tight clasp.

"God keep you, brother," he said. His hand shook a little. "If you don't come back you know what I will do."

"Hush, Nathan. Sometimes you make me think you are a coward. Why couldn't you get along as well, without me, perhaps better?"

The other waited a moment before answering.

"There is no argument about it, Silas; I just couldn't."

He took the gun, and began marching up and down the ordered space.

"Good-bye," said Silas. "I shall be back before dawn."

VII

SILAS went in the direction Agatha had taken, and soon distinguished her white gown in the darkness.

She rose as he came forward and went to meet him.

“You will have to be the guide,” he said.

She hesitated and looked about her into the dark woods.

“Can we go along the railroad?” she asked hopefully. “I can find that way easily.”

He shook his head.

“No. That is guarded, like the road. We shall have to go in the untravelled places. I have a compass. The town, I understand, is directly west of us. Is that right?”

“Yes,” she answered slowly, as she began to plan the route by the few striking landmarks she remembered.

“Tell me exactly which is west. I have lost my bearings since I left the house.”

He went to a nearby tree, and stooping down, lighted a match in his cap, and held up the compass

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

to the light. In a moment he came back to Agatha, saying:

“If we walk in a direct line from this tree we ought to get there.”

They started off, side by side, up the hill. The long grass made their progress slow, some places being so dry that they almost lost their footing. Reaching the top, a thick growth of trees stood forbiddingly before them.

Agatha felt that she could put out her hand and touch the darkness that surrounded them, it was so black, so opaque. As they passed through the dense growth, trees seemed to spring up and bar their progress every moment. This necessitated their going very slowly, and more than an hour had passed before they stood on the brink of a deep valley that the girl recognised.

She led the way down a little path which seemed to go in the right direction, but as they descended into the valley it was lost in the furrowed cotton field. Agatha stopped and turned around.

“I think this is the valley with the creek running through it. The road crosses up that way. The bridge should be very near here.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Her voice showed the fatigue that was creeping steadily upon her, and her feet were swollen and burning from the rough, uneven ground. They walked along steadily, only the sounds of the night about them.

As they reached the creek in the centre of the valley a crisp, rattling sound came to them. Agatha pushed her way close to her companion, and caught hold of his hand suddenly.

“What is it?” he whispered.

“A rattlesnake,” she replied, in a frightened voice.

A soft laugh escaped him. “You are such an enigma,” he said to her, out of the darkness. “You have stood all the horror of that camp back there, and now you are afraid of a snake.”

Agatha did not reply, but still held tightly to his hand. The strong clasp gave her courage. Soon the rippling sound of water told them they were at the creek.

Silas knelt down, and felt the ground around them. It was soft and damp.

“Is it a deep stream?” he asked.

“I don’t think so,” Agatha answered. “If I had

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

known that I should ever need these details, none of them should have escaped me."

Silas broke a long limb from a bush, and dipped it into the water to see how deep it was.

"It is about up to my waist," he said. "I'll have to carry you across."

Turning to Agatha, he picked her up in his arms, and stepped into the water which splashed about him, as he strode firmly through. The rattle of a snake came to them again, this time very near.

Agatha trembled, and clung closer to Silas.

"There is the snake again," she whispered.

He smiled to himself in the dark, unconsciously holding her tighter. He put her safely down on the other side of the creek, and they began walking once more. The hill which bounded the far side of the valley loomed gloomily before them. The ground was covered with a dense growth of weeds, in some places waist high. Thistles and brier bushes scratched them as they pushed their way through.

Agatha lagged behind, Silas going in front, and separating the dense growth with the heavy branch of a tree.

She called to him to stop, but he did not hear,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

because of the noise he was making among the weeds. She exerted her utmost strength and followed him to the foot of the hill.

“I must stop,” she said weakly, and sat down upon the ground.

He took the coat he had been carrying on his arm, and smoothed it out, back of her.

“Lie down here,” he said gently, “and drink a little of this coffee. It will strengthen you.”

He held the canteen to her lips.

“Now, you are a real soldier,” he said, laughing a little, when Agatha had taken several sips of the bitter stuff. He threw himself on the ground near her, and drawing a pipe and pouch of tobacco from his pocket, prepared to smoke. He carefully shaded the glare of the match, and soon they both were looking intently at the warm glow inside the corncob bowl.

“I love your country,” Silas said, puffing slowly at his pipe. “There is something so rugged, so careless and easy in these green sloping hills. It is strange that it has struck me as familiar from the first day I saw it. Our regiment was going up a road, scooped out in a long hill, the walls of earth

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

rising on either side, and they all exclaimed at the unusual sight. I had never seen anything like it myself before, yet it did not seem unfamiliar."

His voice came peacefully to Agatha. It was firm and clear, yet soft, and he spoke in a regular monotone, which did not lack expression, yet carried with it a restful quality. "Then you have never been in the South before?" Agatha said.

"Never," he answered, shifting his arms back of his head.

"I love it, too," Agatha said, watching the moon as it came steadily up into the sky. "I remember once when I was in the East, the homesickness that came over me. I was shut up in a big city with nothing but a continuous stretch of houses everywhere. It was spring time, and yet there was no touch of spring in the air. It was the first time that I had not been at home during that season, and I did so want to get out and roam over the hills. In the late evening, when the sun is setting in the beech grove, and the moon is rising way off over the hills, I love coming home in the twilight and passing the old negro cabins, where the darkies are cutting up wood and getting supper. I don't believe, even if I were a

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

queen, ruling over some delightful land, that I should ever forget that homelike, cheerful sound—the chopping of wood in the twilight.”

She seemed to have lost herself in memories, her voice gradually growing softer and softer, until the last words were whispered, and she closed her eyes in a tired sleep.

Silas moved up closer to her, and leaned over, looking into her face. She was beautiful in the dim moonlight; her face was like marble. He looked at it long and wonderingly.

After a while he rose softly, and looked at his watch. He knew the time was slipping by, and that they must not be longer delayed, yet he felt it would be almost sacrilege to awaken the tired girl. Picking her up as gently as possible, he rested her head upon his shoulder, and cradling her in his arms, began the ascent of the long hill. He was sure that he had not awakened her, and chose his steps carefully, so as not to be uneven in his walk and shake her into consciousness. His muscles throbbed with the effort, and he rested a moment when halfway up. Agatha's head was lying near his face, her breath coming warmly against his cheek. As he felt her heart beat

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

steadily against his, and the tightening clasp of her arm about his neck, he was seized with a sudden desire to kiss her.

Just then a loud explosion broke upon the still night, and the sky was illumined. At the noise Agatha slid from his arms and looked about her in a dazed way.

"I know where we are now," she said at last slowly. "We must be very near the end of the Federal line, for that hill is where I passed the Confederate pickets on my way out."

She turned to Silas. He was looking at the shells travelling through the sky like comets, leaving long tails of light back of them. It was his first view of a bombarded town.

They walked on again, faster now, for Agatha seemed to gain strength as she neared her home. Another hill was climbed, a valley crossed, and the dull glow of a camp fire told them they had reached the Federal lines.

"Is it possible that that is the space that separates the two armies?" Agatha exclaimed.

Silas nodded.

"If you are sure that is the Confederate line," he

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

answered, pointing to the fort across the sunken land. They lay down in the long grass, and crawled carefully past the camp fire, where the guards were drinking, and smoking their corncob pipes. Their voices came distinctly to Agatha. She heard one of them say something about another attack. She stopped a moment listening, but Silas beckoned her to come on. They reached a clump of undergrowth and stopped to take their bearings.

They were about halfway between two camp fires. Directly in front of them was a rough embankment of new earth. A mass of logs and brush covered the top of this. Beyond was the short strip of sunken ground, the debatable land.

“The rest is for you to do,” Silas said, after he had thought a few moments. “You must crawl up to the embankment and slip through. Keep the black cloak about you closely and crawl all the way over that flat space. Go slowly and carefully. If you hear a noise, stop and see what it is. I will stay here to prevent the sentinel from doing any harm. Now go. No—wait!” He kept his hand tightly on hers and held her back.

A man came steadily marching along by the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

embankment. Every now and then he stopped and peered across the open space of land. Gradually his footsteps died out in the gloom toward the next camp.

Agatha made a motion to start and then stopped.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hands.

He held them tightly in his own, looking down at her.

"I hate to have you go into that doomed city," he said. "I feel as if I were sending you to your death."

At that moment it looked as if a thousand bombs were bursting in the air. The whole sky was illumined with the lurid light.

"You think it is best?" he asked.

"Would you leave the ones you loved best to struggle in a whirlpool and not jump in and try to help?"

"No," he answered decidedly.

"Then why do you ask me?"

He still held her hands tightly. They were growing cold in his clasp.

"Is this all? Is this the end?" he asked softly, his voice shaking a little for the first time.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “You have risked your life for me. Can I ever forget it or you?”

A question was in both their eyes. He stooped and kissed her hands passionately.

“Now, go. God help you.”

She crawled rapidly up to the embankment and sprang over.

Everything was still except for the sentinel coming slowly back, over his beaten track. He stopped at regular distances and peered out across the embankment. Silas began to crawl slowly towards the place where Agatha had jumped through. As he lay near it the sentinel stopped there, making the usual inspection. His attention was attracted by a black object slowly moving across the low open ground. After waiting several moments he raised his gun, taking careful aim. Silas sprang up and throwing both arms around him dragged him to the ground before he could even cry out.

“Be quiet,” Silas whispered, gripping his throat with his strong hands. The man did not move. Silas took a large handkerchief and gagged the sentinel with it; then, sitting astride of him he tied his hands

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

together with his belt. The man's helplessness was complete when his own belt bound his feet.

Silas rose, shouldered the man's gun, and walked a little way down the embankment. He stopped at an opening and peered out. He could see a faintly outlined black object at the foot of the opposite hill. He turned back and walked towards the helpless sentinel. The call of the hour was coming along the line. Standing beside the man lying on the ground he repeated in a strong voice. "Three o'clock, and all's well."

When the call died out down the line he returned to the embankment.

Now he could see plainly a white figure almost at the top of the opposite hill. The sound of a woman's voice came softly across on the night air. It was a song he had heard some Confederate prisoners sing. They called it "Dixie."

The white figure reached the top and stood upon the embankment—a spot—silhouetted against the dark sky.

The sharp sound of a rifle came across to him, and the figure disappeared from view on the other side.

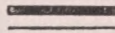
T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas stood as if rooted to the spot. Could it be possible she had been shot by her own people?

The thought almost drove him mad, and he turned and ran wildly back down the hill towards his own camp.

A dead pallor gave the signal of approaching day.

BOOK FOUR



Meeting

I

NATHAN marched up and down, until the rustling awakening noises made him realise that day was approaching. He had begun to look about him uneasily, when Silas came running towards him, from across the road. His face was ghastly in the grey light.

“What is it? Have you been shot?”

He grasped his brother by the shoulder and looked at him anxiously. Silas reached out and took the gun from Nathan in an exhausted way, and began pacing slowly down the line. Nathan kept in step beside him.

“What is it, Silas?” he asked again. “Why don’t you tell me? Did anything happen to the girl?”

Silas kept his face turned away. He did not want to show any signs of weakness before his brother, but his lips moved a little unsteadily when he spoke.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I don’t know, Nathan. The uncertainty of the thing has taken the life out of me. If I only knew! My God, I must know! But how? That is what I tried to think out—a way to hear from her.”

Nathan followed him slowly, not finding any explanation in the broken sentences.

“Did you leave her at the rebel line?” he asked, finally, when Silas said no more.

Silas nodded his head gloomily.

“Yes, but as she climbed over the embankment her own people fired on her, and she disappeared on the other side. She made herself a target, standing up there a full minute, while the shot was fired. I stood and waited for some sound to come to me, some signal to tell me she was safe, but the dead silence maddened me, and I ran back here like a wild man.”

As he stopped speaking, Nathan noticed more closely the weariness which seemed to be overpowering him. The muscles of his face were swollen and palpitating. The blood stood in splotches on his forehead. His legs moved unsteadily as he walked. They had not recovered from the strain that had been put upon them.

Nathan looked at him curiously. He had never

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

seen Silas in such a condition; he had relied upon his brother for quiet strength and cool decision ever since their boyhood. Silas had been his protector and adviser, and when they came to go out into the world had helped him to fight with the crowd for a living.

“Do you care that much for her already, Silas?” Nathan asked, surprise showing in his eyes.

Silas hesitated.

“I don’t know yet, Nathan. Everything seems mixed up. I don’t know my own mind! What a fool I am!”

He laughed shortly and leaned against the fence for support.

Nathan jerked the gun away from him.

“Go to the tent,” he said firmly. “I’ll stay here until the change is made. You’re dead tired, that’s what is the matter.”

Silas turned reluctantly away, and went into the house to notify the officer that his brother would take his place until the watch was relieved. Then he went across the yard to the little village of white tents.

The sun had risen now, and the soldiers had com-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

menced to bustle about in front of the tents, some of them cooking their breakfasts over the camp fires, a crowd of others naked, running across the meadow for a bath in the pond.

Silas went into his tent and threw himself upon the cool ground. He pulled the blanket under his head, as a pillow, but the heat of it irritated him, and he threw it far from him. A bright, yellow glow penetrated through the canvas as the sun rose high in the sky.

He could think of nothing but that silhouette against the night sky, and turned to hide his face from the light. After a while Nathan came in with some cool spring water, and laid a wet cloth upon the tired man's head. In a few minutes he was sleeping peacefully.

The day was growing into a blistering heat.

About noon a man came running down the path between the tents. He was shouting hoarsely, repeating the same words to the thousand questions that were put to him. Nathan stepped outside the tent and listened to him as he ran from one place to another. In his pathway was left amazement and curiosity—in some places, an awful dread.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Nathan turned back into the tent and awoke Silas. He opened his eyes quickly and gazed about him with a dulled expression.

Nathan leaned forward and spoke to him.

“The camp is ordered to break. We are going on the march—to the city. Some of the men say we are going to make an attack, but it may not be so.”

Silas sprang from the ground and stood up, throwing his head back. His strength seemed to have returned. The bright, keen look came back into his eyes as he laughed a happy, hearty laugh.

“Gad’s, that’s fine, Nathan. The way has come to me at last.”

“Are you still thinking about that girl?” Nathan exclaimed in disappointment.

Silas did not reply to the question. The happy look was still on his face, as he moved about energetically, clearing the tent and putting things into his knapsack.

Nathan followed his example, and the tent which had sheltered them for two days was soon folded again.

The whole white village was soon laid upon the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ground. A long line of wagons began to move through, picking up the tents, and poles, and cooking utensils. Where a few minutes before was a permanent-looking settlement was now a black mass of debris.

II

THE regiment was forming for march in front of the house. Officers were rushing about, their gold epaulettes and swords sparkling in the sunlight. An undercurrent of excitement swept through the great body of men. They were impatient to know what would be the next move. Questions were on every lip. Some expressed interest and satisfaction. Others seemed discontented and complained of the march before them, in the intense heat.

Silas broke from the crowd as they were standing about, waiting to be formed into marching columns. A sudden thought had come to him to tell Mrs. Wordsworth that her niece was safe. Ah! could he give her that message though. Did he know? The question haunted him as he ran up the steps.

The group of women and children were standing by the window, looking down upon the departing army. They did not hear Silas step into the room, until he knocked upon the open door.

Mrs. Wordsworth turned a frightened face towards

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

him. There were marks of suffering upon it, and the tear stains had not yet dried. They had gone to Agatha's room in the morning and had found her missing, with no sign of her whereabouts. They thought she must have grown desperate and fled away in the night alone. They feared even to mention her absence to the officers lest it might bring her harm.

Silas stood before Mrs. Wordsworth, his cap in his hand. He admired her calm dignity.

"I came to tell you that she is safe. The young woman who was with you yesterday."

Mrs. Wordsworth stepped back in amazement.

"You mean Agatha. Where is she?"

Silas repeated her name to himself. He had never heard it before.

Mrs. Wordsworth repeated her question.

He hesitated a moment as the uncertainty came back to his mind.

"I saw her disappear over the Confederate lines at three o'clock this morning."

Tears of relief were in Mrs. Wordsworth's eyes as he spoke to her.

As the sound of a drum came to them through the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

window, Silas turned and left the room hurriedly, joining his company in the yard below.

Then the steady tramp of the soldiers began as they marched out from under the soft shade of the trees into the glaring, dust-heated road. The long line of wounded, lying on the cots, groaned and shrieked farewells to their departing comrades. They were left out of it all now.

As the soldiers marched along their feet sank deep into the dust that rose in great clouds about them, completely obscuring the men a few rows in front. The powdered earth covered their uniforms like sifted ashes. Their hair became filled with it and their teeth gritted with the dry stuff. It looked as if they had changed their uniforms for those of their foes. Above them burned steadily the metal sun, unobstructed, reflecting its blinding copper surface into their bloodshot eyes.

They went steadily along the road, sometimes on the top of a long hill, at others in the deep ravines where the closed-in heat was fiercer than the full glare. Up and down the steep ridges they went, until at last a halt was called.

The officers in front seemed to be holding a consul-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

tation as to the direction. Their voices came to the crowd of men in impatient, arguing tones. Finally, they were ordered to march to the right, directly across the open fields. The marching became more broken and irregular, with the unevenness of the ground. Water had been scarce the day before and a burning thirst was drying up their throats.

At the brow of a long ravine that sloped down deep before them to a small stream in the valley, and far off, on the other side, they saw a long line of white on the top of the ridge. A shout of joy went up from the dry throats. Down the side of the ravine they sped and stretching themselves out along the banks of the stream put their heads deep down into the cool water.

Their thirst quenched, they began to anticipate seeing the besieging army.

Grant, Sherman, McClellan were all there, planning the taking of the town. Reports of the impregnable situation of the place, the death traps which the surrounding valleys had made for the attacking army, the wonderful shower of death that fell into the town constantly, had inflamed the imagination of the soldiers. They were to go into camp again, but

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

it was evening before they reached the white city of tents and prepared to settle down for the night.

Silas separated from the others and walked over the new ground with keen interest.

In front of him rose the highest point of the ridge which they occupied. It was covered with an embankment made of sand bags, upon which rested heavy logs and a quantity of brush. Men were working at this protection at different points, strengthening the weak places. Far off down the line there were hundreds of men working, building more protections, hauling logs into place, and dumping huge bags of sand into the low places. The work of defence was being pushed forward with rapidity and regularity. Where the men were exposed the sound of whizzing bullets continually came to them from the enemy's line.

Silas walked up the slanting ground and stood on the ridge of the embankment. Several bullets whistled by him at once. He laughed and jumped down, back of the protection. Walking on to an angle in the earthen wall, he stopped at a low place and looked out before him.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The valley beneath him was deeper than the one he had seen the night before, but the two lines of defence were even nearer. He could hear the men on the opposite side calling to each other and the camp noises came to him distinctly on the evening breeze.

Beyond the heights opposite he could see a group of green trees and hills, rising out of which were the roofs of houses. In the midst of them was a tall grey building with a clock tower. Beyond it, glistening crimson in the setting sun, was a large body of water that seemed to be winding itself out of a vast background of clouds. On either side of the foreground the deep ravine stretched out its long arms, already dark with the coming night. The lights on the scene were changing constantly. One moment the bright green trees were lighted up with a brilliant golden glow, in the next moment they were a black spot upon the landscape.

Silas gazed in front of him until the sun had sunk out of view behind the distant town. A deep yearning was in his eyes, and his lips moved now and then with a single word.

As the darkness shut out the view, he turned and walked back to the camp. The group around the fire

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

were having a noisy, jolly time, as the pot of hot coffee was passed around.

Nathan sat a little apart from the crowd with his back against a tree. He gazed upon the scene around him with the expression of being far from it. It had never seemed to him that he was really one of them.

Silas threw himself upon the ground beside Nathan. "What are they talking about now, Nathan?" he asked, nodding to a group of excited soldiers.

"They say an attack is to be made to-night. Our regiment is to be among the first to charge." He turned a face ashy in its pallor toward Silas. There was a weak smile trembling at the corners of his mouth.

Silas lay flat upon the ground with his face turned up to the sky. The heavens had changed from the dull glow of sunset to a deep, unfathomable blue. The stars came out like fireflies, the leaves rustled, and the camp fires lighted up the trees with a rosy glow, throwing into strong relief the coarsened faces that clustered around them.

Silas smiled up into the heavens. She, no doubt, was watching those same stars, he thought. Then

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

another idea made him sit bolt upright. What if she were dead!

“What time are we ordered out?” he asked Nathan suddenly.

“At twelve to-night. We are to be ready then for an early attack.”

Silas rose and walked up to the group of soldiers. He questioned them all, receiving the same undecided answers.

“Why don’t they tell us?” he said disgustedly, walking away, and going back to Nathan. “We do it all anyhow, not the officers!”

The two sat side by side, silent, a long time. “Brother,” Nathan broke the long quiet, “it will be our first battle. How do you think we’ll stand it?”

Silas did not answer immediately.

“Nathan, let’s wait until to-morrow. The experience will be back of us then.” He smiled hopefully. “Watch me fight to-morrow, Nathan,” he said, the thought illuminating his face. “I have an object before me now. God! I can hardly wait.”

Nathan listened in silence, the wan smile settling upon his white face. An overpowering dread had come to him, freezing the blood in his veins.

III

THE camp fires were shining eyes in the black night. Across the gorge, where the besieged army watched and waited, a dim glow arose above the breast-works. The still night was filled with the sound of chopping axes, falling trees, and the creaking sound of the heavy wagons hauling the protecting logs to the edge of the ridge, and far off over the distant town came the intermittent flashing and the rumbling sound of the bombardment.

In and out of the groups that clustered around the fires men were walking rapidly, giving careful, distinct instructions to the commanders of the different companies.

The quiet of preparation had fallen over the spirit of the men. It was a deliberate getting ready for death. Each one kept fear within his breast. It was only pride that made them appear brave.

One man in a group stretched his legs out on the dry ground, yawning.

"I wish it was time for us to get at 'em," he said.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“That’s a lie,” another had answered. “The whole lot of us are scared to death, and so are you,” and first the speaker had stolen silently away into the darkness.

In the intenseness of the waiting, the hours seemed to fly. It was not the waiting that they dreaded, it was the end of the waiting which they wished would never come.

Finally the hour of movement came. They formed into columns and marched out of the camp to the open ground along the ridge of the hills. They moved on steadily, lanterns flashing before them, lighting the way. Then came a halt and the ranks broke.

Instructions came to them to go down the hill and line up in the bed of the creek. In the dim night light they crept over the embankment and went carefully down the hillside, disappearing into the black depths of the ravine. On and on came the black objects, the supply seeming inexhaustible, as company after company sank into the gorge; and not until the silver glow of morning began to light up the scene did the army stop coming.

The plan of the attack was to rush up the hill

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

between two points which jutted out and made a recess in which the Confederates had built no protection. Their ground was so admirably suited for defence that they had concentrated on the prominent points of the ridge, thinking that they were sufficiently well situated to protect both themselves and the undefended places. In this way, if an attack were made, they could stand in the protected positions and pour a steady fire into the enemy from both sides.

With the sun came a deadly fire from the heights the army had just left. The artillery had begun the battle. The crash of cannon filled the air. A Parrott shell whistled above the heads of the soldiers crouching at the bottom of the gorge. It seemed as if the deserted camp had risen up and cursed the army that had left it, blaspheming it with the help of fiery demons.

The ravine took up the sound and threw it back with added reverberations. The hills went on repeating it farther and farther away, like giant sentinels calling the hours in succession.

Silas and Nathan lay side by side, behind the protecting bank of the creek. Before them loomed up

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

black the almost impregnable fortifications of the enemy. They did not speak to each other. Once every little while Silas would put out his hand and touch Nathan's arm as if to reassure him. Nathan did not respond to the touch; he lay perfectly still. When the first light of the morning came, his eyes roved about the ground and became glued upon a group of heavy logs that spanned the creek directly at his side. The two men next to him were shielded by the projection. It looked to be a bridge strong enough to hold any army that might pass over it.

When the deepening roar of the battery came, he edged a little closer to the projection. Silas did not see the movement, so intent was he upon the work in hand, and when the order came to charge he rose out of the ditch and hurried forward with the crowd, thinking that Nathan was beside him. Silas rushed across the open ground until the jutting heights of the enemy formed a protection from their fire which was already very heavy. With the outburst of the artillery the enemy was awakened in great surprise. They had not thought that an attack would be made at such a hazardous place and lost time in forming a plan of action. In the meantime the attacking

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

force had gained the protection of the projecting height.

Then down upon the Federal line poured a rain of fire, heavy, pelting, murderous. Some of the men threw their hands above their heads in terror, but they had to stand and take it. "It's a death trap. We're caught. What fool planned this?" one man yelled above the din. His face was distorted with fear and rage. A flow of curses fell from his lips.

Silas stood waiting impatiently. Something must be done. Something would be done he felt sure. They could not have planned such a foolish attack as this. The fierce, death-dealing rain fell about on all sides as he stood there waiting for the assistance he knew would come. Shading his eyes with his hands he looked about for Nathan. Crowded around him, hovering close to the ground, trying to burrow their way into the earth, were the terrified soldiers. Pride had left them now. They were their true selves in the full power of their uncontrollable terror. Death was everywhere. Their friends were dropping beside them. They had to stumble over the dead bodies to move about at all. They were entirely hemmed in, for the open ground that stretched back

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

to their line was even more death-giving than where they now stood. The height of the enemy's line above them took away certainty of aim, and instead of bullets, exploding shells, heavy pieces of timber, huge logs were rolled down upon them. Harmless-looking black objects were hurled down into their midst, lying unnoticed until the lighted fuse had burned its way into the powder chamber. Then the awful, crashing noise would come, and men fell in heaps.

Years seemed to have passed before the sound of a bugle came to their deafened ears and an answer replied from their own heights. At this signal the plan of attack began to work. Blue-coated men came over the Union parapet like a multitude of ants until the sloping hill turned from green into a dark, moving mass of blue. The whole face of the earth seemed made of them.

The clever ruse succeeded. The attention of the Confederates was diverted from the foes close at hand to the great multitude coming toward them from the open ground. So great a force must not be allowed to advance, and their fire was turned aside.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas grasped the situation. He saw that the commander's plan was being achieved. With the cessation of the pouring rain of fire he rushed about him looking for Nathan. He called him until he was hoarse with shouting. He even turned over some of the bodies of fallen men to see if Nathan were among them when the order came to charge up the hill, into the line.

The rush swept him on, and he forgot everything in the fierce desire for ceaseless action that controlled him. The blood beating in his head sounded like thunder. His pores seemed to be opening and letting out the boiling fluid.

Every now and then his sight would clear and he could see a little of what was taking place. Once, as he stopped to reload his gun a man fell beneath him and held him by the leg. He pulled away and tried to kick himself loose, but the man's grip was firm. It was the grip of death. In his awakened barbarism, Silas pounded the man's terrified face with his gun butt until the grasp relaxed. Everyone about him was in a frenzy, they knew not what they did, only that a force back of them was pushing them on into a blazing furnace.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Where is that damned cat I hear whining?” a man called out petulantly.

“It’s the minie balls whizzing, you fool,” an old soldier answered.

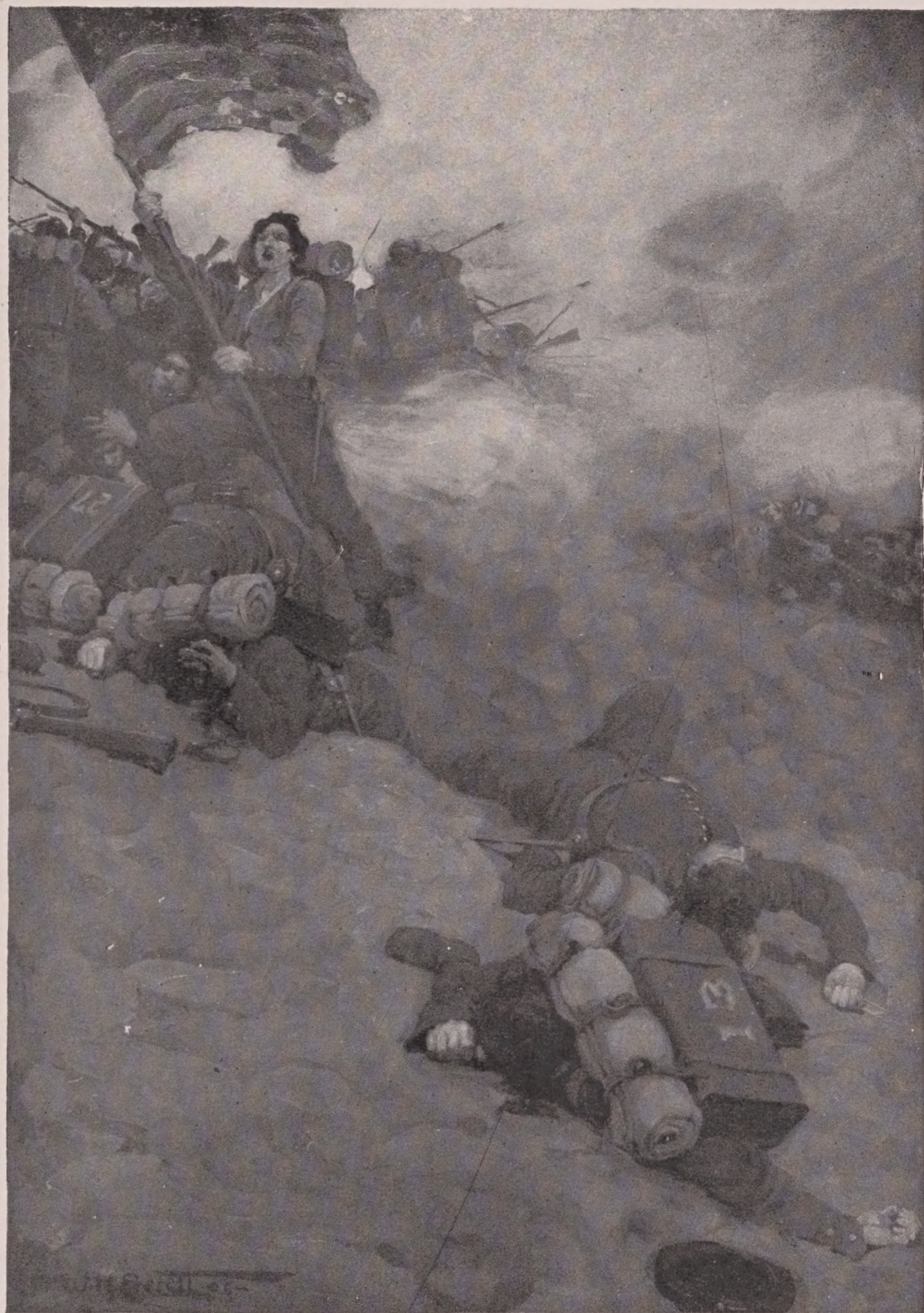
Hoarse cries were on all sides, some talking continually to themselves, other mumbling in a silly, meaningless way. Steadily on they went, up to the enemy’s stronghold.

Suddenly a panic came in the Confederate line, The attacking army was within a foot of them now. One more concentrated, forward move, and they would be on the breast-work. The officers were back of them, pushing them forward, until the line was complete.

“Now,” they yelled, in unison.

The two opposing lines of men were face to face, with death holding wide-open arms behind each of them. There was a moment’s pause, the silence of a crisis. Then the dark blue line mingled with the grey.

Silas saw several men fall on the embankment directly in front of him leaving an unguarded space on the parapet. He sprang quickly upon it, closely following the flag-bearer, who fell headlong to the



SILAS PLANTING THE FLAG

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ground. A yell came from the besieged, "Their flag is down," they cried, joy in their voices.

Silas jerked the pole from the dead boy's hands and rammed it in the ground on the breast-works. The wind unfurled the flag, and it floated calmly out on the gentle breeze over the riot beneath. A thousand throats took up the cry of victory, and the ravine rang with the glorious sound. Above the noise of the battle a band was heard playing a popular air.

Silas turned to the crowd back of him. They were falling like ten pins.

"Follow the colours, boys," he shouted to them, and climbed upon the embankment to protect the flag.

A face was continually before him on the other side of that death wall. It seemed to say "Come, Come," and encouragement burned in the dark eyes. "Yes, I will; I'm coming," his brain reiterated, every other thought shut out. "Nothing shall keep me back; not even death."

As he sprang upon the embankment, a man stood before him pointing a bayonet at his breast. Silas seized the gun, and threw both arms around the man, protecting himself from the fire that was directed

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

toward him. They writhed and struggled in fierce combat just as thousands of others were doing around them. It seemed forever to Silas before the other men rallied to his aid and that part of the parapet was taken.

IV

SILAS crouched down a moment in the shade of the parapet. His throat seemed closed up. He leaned his head on his hands and coughed out the blood that had risen in his mouth. Could he have been shot? His hair felt sticky and grimy, and his whole head was bruised and sore. His clothes were riddled in places with bullet holes, and blood trickled from his hands where he had grabbed the man's bayonet, but he was not wounded. A wonder came to him amid the roar and thunder of the battle at the marvellous Power that had kept him untouched when so many about him had fallen. He bent his head again, and prayed.

The fierce Rebel yell brought him back to his surroundings with a shock. His companions, along the embankment were not holding their position. They began to run down the hill. He rose, climbed to the top of the embankment and looked over. The whole top of the ridge was covered with men in grey. Reinforcements had come to them in the moment of need

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and all along the line of earthworks they were beating back the men in blue. Their horrible, ear-splitting yell was heard everywhere. The echo of it sounded deep into the ravine, making the retreating army look up startled, as if an attack had been begun on the other side.

Silas rushed after the hurrying men. "Come back, you fools!" he yelled. "We can hold the place. Come back, you cowards! Damn you, beasts, sneaking liars!" All the vile epithets that he had ever heard he threw after them. They did not heed him but kept on retreating down the hill. He followed them furiously, tears of impotent rage streaming down his face.

When he caught up with them, he looked so strange that they were afraid of him. He was like some wild devil turned loose in an arena of persecuted souls.

As they reached the bottom of the ravine, the whole world seemed to have turned upon them a fierce hail of red fire, which came from the hill back of them through steady clouds of red smoke. The noise was terrific and was increased by the echoes beating against the sides of the ravine. The men were losing their hearing, their tongues had ceased to move, and

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

they staggered along blindly towards the creek, many falling headlong into it in their haste, to be crushed to death by those who followed.

Suddenly Silas stood still. Curses fell from his lips as he realised that Nathan was not with him. He turned and tried to go back, but he was like a fly before the wind in the wild flight. He was shoved across the bridge of logs, along the level ground and up the sloping side of the hill, his eyes closed, his legs carrying him automatically along. The life had gone out of him now. He cared for nothing. He had been near to her but had failed at the last moment. Getting back to camp became to him a black horror.

He fell against the embankment at the top of the ridge and opened his eyes. There was something familiar about the man climbing in front of him.

“Nathan—Nathan—Nathan!” he cried, aloud.

The young fellow turned at the call. His face had a look of settled horror. His hair was covered with a heavy coating of mud, his clothes were saturated and dripping with water and blood. His eyes were sunken and had lost their clear, blue colour. They looked faded.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

When Silas called him he did not reply, only shaking his head when asked if he were wounded.

They walked on together silently to their tent. In their ears the noise of the battle was a dull roar now ; the sharpness and stress had gone out of it.

V

THE two men stumbled along in a fatigued, aimless way. The embankment back of them was still covered with the retreating multitude.

As they went Silas told Nathan of the cowardice of the men which had lost the day for them when it was so nearly won. He spoke in the coarse language of the camp, showing the influence of his association with the rough soldiers in his uncontrollable, raging disappointment.

Nathan listened quietly, the same dull look in his face. He seemed oblivious both of the scene about him and of what Silas was saying.

Gradually Silas wore himself out with his passionate tirade, and became silent and preoccupied.

As he tried to recall the scenes of movement and excitement in the battle he found that they had gone from him as quickly as they had come. One incident only stood out clearly in his mind.

During one of the pauses in the charge up the hill, he had noticed a delicate little pink primrose in his

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

path. He had stooped and pulled it, slipping it into the button hole of his shirt. It was still there, its fragrant beauty gone. Silas' laugh rang out harshly.

"To think that I should do a thing like that at such a moment."

Nathan shifted his position and turned his face away.

The artillery was still roaring across the ravine, the thundering sound filling the air. An officer walked by. Silas rose, saluted and asked him the time of day.

"Eight o'clock," was the curt reply.

"Is that all?" Silas sat down again in wonderment. Could it be possible that the battle had lasted such a short time? He thought it had been an eternity. His eyes closed with an overpowering fatigue, his head fell upon his breast, and he sank into a long, deep sleep.

The day wore on, the heat increasing each moment. The high ridge of the camp cleared of the large trees lay fully exposed to the glaring heat. Down in the ravine the ground lay spotted with dark objects, their mutilated, still faces turned up to the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

glistening sun. The terrible roar of the morning had gradually ceased, and a dead silence lay like a pall over all nature. One day's work had been done.

Nathan sat by Silas in the long, steady quiet. He had not opened his lips once. War had written its story upon his face.

The afternoon sun sending a ray into Silas' face awakened him. He sat up and rubbed his eyes with his grimy fingers. The look of impatience came back into his face and he rose and walked about. His desire had only been fed by the discouragement, the loss of the day. He stopped his nervous striding, and stood looking down at Nathan.

"I must get into the town, Nathan," he said decidedly. "I can't stand the uncertainty of the thing. When I reached the enemy's ground, yesterday, it was the first relief that I have had since she left me. I seemed to be nearer her then, and I imagined I heard her calling to me. My God, to think that I was so near and lost it all."

The look of disappointment and rage that made the men on the battle-field fly from him came into his eyes again.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Tell me what to do, Nathan. How can I get to her?”

The younger fellow shrugged his shoulders indifferently. The look in his eyes, as he raised them to Silas, was like some dumb, hunted animal.

“What is the matter with you, boy?” Silas exclaimed, looking at him keenly. “Are you wounded? You don’t look like yourself?”

In the return to his normal state, Silas became aware of the change that had taken place in Nathan. It came to him with a shock—that his own upturned nature had made him lose sight of his companion.

He threw himself down by Nathan, and put his arm gently around him, his love for the boy speaking in his soft touch.

The drawn lines about Nathan’s face relaxed a little. It was the first sign of sympathy he had had from Silas since the battle.

“What is it, Nathan? You have not spoken once, to-day.”

The young fellow shook like a leaf at the touch of kindness. It was what he had been craving without knowing it. He struggled vainly to control

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

himself, and fell forward upon Silas' breast, his body shaken with gasping sobs.

"Silas, Silas," he cried as if asking for help.

Silas held him tightly in his arms till the sobs had ceased, looking down at him with concern.

"What is it, Nathan?" he asked gently. "What has shaken you up so?"

Nathan did not raise his head, but his body trembled as he spoke. "It was hell, Silas. It was hell," he repeated over and over again.

The stronger man held him tighter.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "it was, but it's over now."

There was a tone of encouragement in his voice which gave strength to his brother.

After a while Nathan raised his head and gazed about him. He looked more natural now, the boyishness had gone forever from his face, but the sweet expression was coming again into his eyes. By degrees the details about him began to take familiar shape. The blurred red and black of his vision melted into the green of the trees about him. He noticed the trees as they turned in the breeze, and saw again the ground with its long, trodden grass.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The touch of his fingers on the mossy tree brought a cool, refreshing sensation to his skin, and he began to realise that the wet, blood-stained clothing felt uncomfortable and hot. He was coming back to himself out of the horror which had paralysed his brain, as if he were awakening from a nightmare, weak with the cold sweat of terror.

Silas sat quietly thinking as Nathan regained control of himself, his eyes shining with the thoughts which passed through his mind.

“Ah, I have it.” He sprang to his feet in his excitement. “I can go into the city as a spy.”

Nathan looked at him in amazement.

“A spy,” he said, with an accent of repulsion. “Do you love that girl enough for that?”

“Yes,” said Silas slowly. “I must know if she is safe or I shall go mad.”

He strode up and down the ground excitedly.

“How can you do it?” Nathan asked.

“I shall go to the general and volunteer as a spy. They have got to know the condition of the town and how much ammunition they have to withstand a siege. I understand that is their plan. I heard an officer say this morning that information was abso-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

lutely necessary for their success, and I will offer to find out what they want to know."

Nathan listened intently, carried away by the enthusiasm of Silas.

"If I go at once, to-night, I shall stand a better chance of getting through safely. I must see her." Silas spoke emphatically.

Nathan stood up and grasped his arm. "Let me go with you," he said, his face was lighted with a new hope.

"You! What for?"

Nathan's eyes sparkled. "For the danger," he answered.

Silas laughed. "For the danger, Nathan? You have wondered at me for taking all this risk for a girl I scarcely knew and now you do it just for the danger. What do you mean?"

Nathan looked steadily before him, as he answered, "I don't want to be separated from you again as I was yesterday, Silas. I want to go side by side with you to the front, and to be in the midst of danger, where the bullets are falling thickest."

He stopped a moment, the enthusiasm of a fanatic burning in his glance.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Get orders for me to go when you do, Silas. I mean to go with you.”

Silas saw his determination, and reluctantly consented. He felt the responsibility of Nathan's safety and knew he should never forgive himself if harm came to him. Then he left him quickly, and walked toward the officers' tent.

VI

THE singing of the negroes as they worked in the intrenchments came steadily up with the other camp noises, as the day wore itself away into the night.

The fortifications began to assume large proportions and the fire of the enemy fell harmlessly against the barricade. Large cannons were dragged about, and placed in the most prominent positions. Queer-shaped mortar-guns had been constructed out of tough timber and wrapped with chains. They were tested when placed and were found to do admirable work.

Silas and Nathan had begun their preparations in the tent, having obtained permission from the colonel of their regiment, who had noticed Silas' bravery in the morning.

They put on civilian clothes after having washed the signs of the battle from their grimy bodies. The water and the comfort of fresh garments brought new life to them.

Silas wore a dark-grey suit, with a large felt hat

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

thrown carelessly on his head. His bluish-black hair, pushed back from his forehead, threw into relief his strongly moulded features.

There was a power, an undefined force in his bearing, which made the men look at him admiringly. His manner to them had always been simple and courteous, and although he had mingled little with them, they had not misconstrued it, for they had felt the difference between them. They knew he did not belong with them in any way and unconsciously recognised his superiority.

As the two brothers turned from the camp, Silas led the way, walking close to the embankment. They passed sentinels every few steps, and giving the watchword softly they went on into the darkness.

Just as their sight was beginning to accustom itself to the dim starlight, they came out on a high knoll, which commanded a view of the whole surrounding country.

In front of them lay a wide sheet of water, for here the ends of both ridges sloped off abruptly into the river. Beneath them was the gorge in which they had fought that morning. The stream that had protected them here formed itself into a series of water-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

falls, and went tumbling down to join the great river. Across the gorge against the dark sky loomed the black outlines of a fort, boldly outlined.

Silas stood and looked about him. He could see a flag floating on the top of the fort as if suspended in the sky.

"Gad—what a stronghold!" he said. "I don't wonder they call it the Gibraltar of the South."

Nathan pulled his belt tighter and felt for his pistol. "Come on, Silas," he said impatiently. "We must not waste time. It is close on to midnight, now."

They climbed across the embankment and began to descend the slope.

An hour had passed before they reached the bottom, and taking off their shoes they walked carefully across the stream. They could not see in the darkness that it was running red. When they had passed over and walked a little distance, they were confronted by a sheer precipice. Looking up they saw above them, almost on a straight line, the flag of the enemy's stronghold fluttering in the strong breeze.

Since they had left the protection of their own

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ground Nathan had led the way, never stopping, and remonstrating with Silas for his unnecessary watchfulness. He showed no signs of realising the great danger surrounding them, and made the start up the steep hill, Silas following close behind. They could not go rapidly, as their feet slipped from under them on the dry grass, and it seemed to them that they lost two steps for each one gained.

At last they gained the protection of a clump of trees halfway up, and sat down for a few moments to rest.

Nathan pulled out a canteen and poured the coffee into his mouth. His coat was torn into shreds and he pulled it off. His light shirt made a white spot in the darkness.

"That won't do, Nathan," remonstrated Silas. "They will see you."

"I can't stand the heavy thing. It suffocates me. I'll keep close to the ground in the shadows."

They started off again, more slowly this time, for the top of the hill was not far off now. The distant call of a sentinel made them both stop short and listen. They were even nearer than they had thought. Each sunken spot on the hillside was a protection.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

They jumped from one shadow to another, until they lay down safely in the darkness under the embankment. They lay there, their pulses thumping in the stillness until they felt that someone must hear them.

The dead silence was broken by the heavy tread of an approaching sentinel. He passed directly above them and walked on along the embankment. Nathan made a start forward. Silas jerked him back.

“Go slow, man. You must be careful. There is another one coming.”

Drawing back they lay flat against the ground again. The footsteps passed above them and went on. Silas lifted his head and listened. Everything was perfectly still now. A shell had just burst in the sky, and the bright flash had left the night even blacker for the moment of light. He touched Nathan on the arm and they both rose softly and crept over the mass of bags and logs.

A deep trench lay on the other side, and they slid down into it and waited. They heard the sentinel in the distance coming toward them, and presently he passed within a foot of them. Silas stopped breathing; he could have touched the man.

A clearing lay between the ditch and a clump of

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

dark bushes. They would have to cross this before they could go on.

The sentinels were now out of hearing, so they both stood up and calculated the distance. One dash would make it. Crawling across the ground would take too long. They rose up side by side, and made the spring together.

As they reached the open space, a sharp report rang out back of them. It was too late to turn back, and in a moment they were lying flat in the bushes. The sentinels came running up and moved steadily toward the dark bush that shielded the two men.

Silas drew his pistol from his belt and cocked it. The desperate moment had come. Just as he raised the pistol and aimed at the first man, the howl of a dog came out of the darkness a few yards away. The approaching sentinel laughed and turned away.

"Well," he said to his companion, still laughing, "that is a good joke on me. Wasting my ammunition on a dog."

They turned to the parapet, joking over the matter as they again took up their march.

The dark bush began to move slightly, as Silas and Nathan made their way softly toward the shad-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ows of the trees. The worst was over now, they thought, as they moved steadily on, within the Confederate lines.

They left the embankment in their rear and walked straight before them until the ridge sloped off into a gorge, which ran parallel with the long hill that shut out the view of the river. As they descended into the protecting darkness of this gully the sound of the shells became more and more distinct, as if the explosions were almost over their heads. The ground was becoming almost impassable, and the dense undergrowth, twisted vines and weeds, so completely blocked the way that they were compelled to make many detours, frequently retracing their steps.

Nathan, who up to this time had been leading the way, lagged behind a little, and let Silas do the exploring. When they came suddenly to a deeply washed gully, Silas caught hold of Nathan's arm to steady himself. His hand closed upon a warm, wet shirt sleeve, which seemed to be sticking to the arm.

Nathan gave a gasp of pain, and Silas grasped his hand, running his own up the limp, lifeless arm. "What is this on your sleeve, Nathan?" he said. "It feels like blood."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

"It is," Nathan answered quietly. "They shot me up there in the bushes. I didn't think they had hurt me much, but I guess I'll have to stop." He sank down on the ground, amid the wild growth.

Silas stood beside him in dismay.

"What can we do now?" he kept repeating over and over to himself. Just as he had thought the danger passed a worse calamity had fallen upon them.

All sorts of horrible memories came surging into his mind, the tense suffering of the wounded soldiers came back to him, and the remembrance that erysipelas had developed in so many wounds that had not been cared for at once.

Nathan made an effort to rise, but fell back again.

"Better go on without me, Silas. I'll find you somewhere in the town to-morrow morning." Silas did not answer. He ran over to some higher ground and looked about him.

The converging sides of the hills closed them in, the gully leading out toward the town. On the still night floated the sound of the town clock striking two. The town could not be far off; and assistance and help must be within a short distance of them. But how could he explain the situation? A wild feel-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

ing of bitterness flashed into his mind—bitterness against Nathan. He had not been asked to come, and the whole plan had failed on account of him. The feeling disappeared as quickly as it had come, and he bowed his head in sudden shame. If the love for this girl could develop such traits in him he would cast her out of his thoughts forever. He strained his eyes into the darkness to find some house, or place, where he could take Nathan.

A flash from one of the mortars showed him a large white house near the top of the hill. In a moment the light went out before he had glanced at the intervening ground.

He ran back to Nathan and urged him to get up. "I've found a place, Nathan. There's a big house over on that hill. We will go to it and ask for help."

Nathan staggered to his feet, the blood trickling rapidly down his arm.

"I don't think I can walk, Silas. Steady me with this arm. Go slow, man."

They walked along, halting every few minutes to rest. Another flash from the exploding shells showed them the white house again. They were in a direct line with it, down the hill.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Nathan leaned more heavily against Silas and groaned.

“Leave me, Silas,” he said. “It is torture to walk. I can’t stand it.” He pulled away and fell helplessly to the ground.

Silas stooped down beside him and started to pick him up in his arms. “For God’s sake, Silas, leave me quiet. I can’t stand the moving.”

“I see a protected-looking place ahead of us on the hillside,” he urged, lifting Nathan up and carrying him quickly forward. A few steps more, and he stopped at a dug-out, level place, forming a small terrace on the side of the hill. Back of it opened the mouth of a large cave. The place showed signs of being used. Several chairs were placed near the opening, and a wire stand containing growing plants in pots stood on the terrace.

Silas looked carefully about and listened. Placing Nathan gently on the ground, he made a search within the cave and about the surrounding ground. No one was to be seen, and he felt that they were safe for the night at least.

When he returned to Nathan he found him groaning. With his knife Silas cut away the ragged sleeve

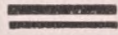
T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

from the wounded arm. The flesh was badly torn, but when the pieces of the sleeve were removed, the blood flowed more freely, opening the wound.

Silas took off his own shirt, and tore it into long bandages, as he had learned to do in camp. All he needed now was water to wash away the blood, and on the little stand of flowers he found an old sprinkler half filled with it. He bathed the wound clean, and tied it up firmly with the bandages.

Nathan settled himself comfortably on the ground, and soon fell asleep. Silas sat beside him keeping watch. He was near Agatha now, but he was not happy. Through his love for her calamity had come to Nathan. Love was not all joy then, but a thing of manifold sides.

BOOK FIVE



Suspense

I

WHEN Agatha left Silas and crossed the open ground toward the Confederate fortifications, the idea came to her to make some continued sound, so that the pickets should not be taken entirely by surprise. As she began to climb the hill she took off the black cloak, leaving her white gown clearly distinct in the darkness, and began to sing quietly, raising her voice as she neared the top and not stopping until she stood upon the embankment.

A man jumped from the shadows on the other side and recklessly fired upon her without taking aim.

A dazed sensation passed over Agatha when she heard the report; and she stood still, wondering if she were shot. As the sentinel called to her to halt, she asked him to help her across the intrenchment.

“Who are you? What do you want? Where do you come from?” The sentinel’s questions came in quick succession, and he kept the gun pointed at her.

“I am Agatha Windom, a citizen of this town; I

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

have made my escape through the Union lines. Ask Capt. Eldridge. He passed me through here three days ago when I went out to my relatives."

She advanced a little as she spoke.

"Capt. Eldridge is not here now. He was removed two days ago. I cannot let you advance."

Agatha sat down upon the ground in despair.

"Well, find someone who was here then. I must get through. Someone will surely know me."

The man came up close and looked at her keenly.

"You will have to wait here until the next sentry comes. I cannot leave you here alone." He spoke with decision and was evidently suspicious.

Several minutes passed in silence. Then Agatha rose hurriedly.

"You *must* take me to your commander at once," she said. "I cannot remain here any longer. I have come five miles and I am worn out."

The man looked about him helplessly; then, raising his hands to his lips, he gave a low whistle. In a second, three men came running out of the shadow, and stood about him. One of them advanced toward Agatha and looked at her curiously. A sword at his side glistened in the starlight.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“This woman,” explained the sentry, “came across the embankment a few minutes ago, and says she is from one of the Union camps. She came through here three days ago, she says, going out of town to visit her relatives, and now wants to get back home. Shall I let her pass?”

The man who had advanced toward Agatha uttered a startled exclamation as he came nearer to her.

“Good God! Agatha, is it you?”

Robert Sentrill’s voice sounded sharp on the still night. Agatha stood up suddenly and swayed toward him.

“Oh, Robert.” Her voice came indistinct and broken. “Take me home. Take me home.”

She broke into sobs as he caught her in his arms. The sentry went quickly away on his line of march, and the other men disappeared into the shadows again.

In a few moments, when Agatha had regained her composure, Robert led her to the camp fire and ordered some coffee brought to her. She took a sip of the strong drink and sat down on a box before the encouraging blaze.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Robert sat down beside her, taking her hand between his and caressing it gently. "Tell me all about it, Agatha," he said, raising her hand to his lips. "Your father has been almost mad since the town was surrounded. There seemed to be no way of finding out anything about you. I went to your home the first chance after we got into the town and found everyone terribly worried about you. Never mind, dear, you are back—you are safe."

He drew closer and put his arm about her, but she scarcely seemed to feel his caress. Another face was there across the fire, with a hauntingly familiar look in the strong features. Then she seemed to see the weaker face, the one with the clear blue eyes. The fire blazed up redly and brought before her the dead man, the one who had said, "Don't let it be red." She sprang up with a cry of terror and covered her face with her hands.

"Take me home, Robert. I am ill. I can't talk."

She steadied herself against him in her agitation.

"The shells are not so thick in the early morning, Agatha," said Robert soothingly. "Don't you think we had better wait until then?"

"Never mind the danger, Robert. It is just to

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

get back. My father! I can't wait to see him. Oh, I wish he were here."

Robert made her sit down by the roadside, and went in search of something in which to drive her home. He soon returned with the camp wagon, a rough, noisy vehicle drawn by a mule that seemed long ago to have completed his life's work. Every bone in his emaciated body was on the point of sticking through his skin.

Robert lifted Agatha into the wagon, and in a moment they were jolting off in the direction of the town. The rising sun lighted the dismal stretch of dusty road in front of them, as the mule pulled slowly along over the uneven places, throwing clouds of dust into their faces, while the wagon creaked incessantly.

The familiar road looked strangely new to Agatha since she had passed over it some days before. Long lines of tents were on either side, stretching far out toward the line of intrenchments.

As they drove into the streets of the town things took on a more lively aspect. Men in grey uniforms were coming out of nearly every house they passed, or standing upon the corners, their lean, careworn faces looking ghostly in the searching morning light.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Gloom was everywhere, penetrating even the atmosphere, and the church bell ringing out for morning prayer appeared to toll.

Agatha's happiness at returning home became less keen as she looked about the streets. An old house which held many pleasant memories for her stood a wreck upon its green terraces. A shell had exploded through the centre and laid the sides wide open. Almost all the available ground had been dug into caves for the women and children. Their wan faces looked out from the dark openings into the bright morning light and added to the sepulchral effect.

As they passed a large white frame house, with a flag flying from it, Robert told Agatha that the family had been ordered out of the house three days ago after the retreat of the soldiers, and it had been used as a hospital ever since.

Agatha shut her eyes as she passed the place. She knew too well what it meant.

They passed the old grey Court House, standing stately among its green trees. That at least had not been destroyed.

She thought of the conversation between Robert

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and herself on the day of his departure. She had thought herself changed then, but how much greater had been the change since that time. She looked closely at Robert for the first time, as he sat beside her, guiding the mule. There were no signs of war upon him. His uniform was fresh and spotless-looking; the gold lace upon it was displeasing to her. Her mind kept turning back to the blood-stained garments she had grown used to; in the light of which Robert seemed to her less like a soldier. "But he is an officer," she kept insisting to herself, "and I do not suppose they see much rough service." Her loyalty caused her to make excuses for the man she had loved. As they passed Robert's home, standing back in its shady lawn, Agatha asked for Mrs. Sentrill. It was the second time she had spoken on the long drive.

"She is very well, in fact was never better. I come in every evening to take supper with her. She has got over her fear of the shells. In fact everyone is getting used to them now."

They passed on down the hill, and rumbled across the bayou bridge. As the valley came into view, Agatha exclaimed, and stood up in the wagon. A

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

transformation had taken place while she had been away. The whole bottom of the valley was filled with a city of tents. They were clustered closely along the banks of the bayou and scattered along on the side of the hills. She thought of the ceaseless passing in the night which she had heard and seen at Elmwood. She wondered if all this multitude could have gone by in a single night. Everywhere soldiers walked about, busily engaged in their duties; some washed kettles and cooking utensils in the stream; others were building fires and hanging great pieces of meat to roast above the flames; while a steady stream of shells from the gunboats fell pitilessly upon the white tents.

Robert drove rapidly across the low ground, in order to reach the protection of the dug-out road. In the distance the white columns of the old house stood out bright against the surrounding hills.

The tears came into Agatha's eyes as she saw her home before her, just as she had left it.

She left Robert at the gate and walked eagerly up to the porch. Everything was very still in the sparkling morning light. It seemed so cool and full of peace. The garden welcomed her back with its

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

masses of bright colour. A bed of pale pink poppies made her wish to throw herself among them and sleep away the awful memories. It was like coming into Heaven out of the horrors of the life behind her.

As she pushed open the door and stood in the dark, cool hall the familiar odour of the place came to her. The clean, white walls and polished floors had never seemed so beautiful before. She walked slowly toward the library. She did not want to hurry, or to lose any of it; it was all too sweet to her.

The library door stood open. She stepped upon the threshold and looked in.

Her father sat in his big, leather chair, looking out into the garden. His back was to Agatha, and he was so quiet that she thought he must be asleep. She tiptoed up behind him, putting her hand on the back of his chair, looking down at him. The expression that came over his face as he turned and saw her repaid her for all she had suffered. He rose from his chair and put his arms around her without speaking.

"I have seen it all," Agatha said softly, in answer to the mute question in his eyes. "I have looked into the depths, father. It is "Ruin, Desolation, Death."

II

WHEN Hester came into the house to set the dinner table, she found them there. "Lordy, Miss, I shore am glad to see you," she exclaimed. "My, but you look bad!" The kind darkey led her upstairs to the large, high-ceiled bedroom, and undressing her gently, put her in bed between the cool linen sheets. Then she left her to herself, to drift into the deep sleep of mental exhaustion.

Agatha slept all through the afternoon and night and into the morning of the next day. Her mind and body had insisted upon a needed relaxation, and the long dreamless sleep had come with its rejuvenating power. Through it all the face of a soldier had followed her, not in connection with scenes did she see him, but he seemed always to be there. Her father came and sat beside her at different times of the afternoon and night, and once he knelt at the bedside and prayed.

The next morning Hester rushed into the room, her face blanched with fear.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Miss Agathy,” she cried, at the top of her voice, “get up. They is fightin’ ober on de hill dah. An’ de bullets is jest a-flyin’ against de house. Git up, fur de Lawd’s sake, missis, and come down to de cave. We’s all gwine down dar.”

Agatha roused herself, and got out of bed. She could hear sounds as of hail on the roof, now and then, as spent bullets fell against the house. A thundering roar was coming from the hill back of the house. As she looked out of the window, heavy clouds of smoke were drifting toward the town. The smell of powder filled the air to suffocation.

“It’s de Yankees, Miss Agathy,” Hester continued in her high-keyed voice. “They’s jest drivin’ all de men from de ’trenchments. You kin see ’em runnin’ back ober de hill.” Agatha listened intently as she hurriedly threw on her clothes.

This was the attack she had heard the man talking about in the camp, and she had forgotten to warn them of it. It was too late, now. She had lost the chance of saving many lives.

“Where is father?” Agatha asked, after a moment.

“He’s downstairs in de liberry. Please make him

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

come down to de cave, Miss Agathy. It's shore dangerous up heah."

Agatha finished dressing and ran downstairs. Her father was pacing up and down the library floor, his short, quick stride showing his excitement.

"Is there much danger, father?" she asked, when he had kissed her.

"Not unless they get through the line. It all depends upon the day's battle. There is no telling what may happen if they get into the town now." Dull misery spoke in the tones of his voice. "We have Butler's Code, as an example."

Agatha shuddered and turned toward the window. They were on the side opposite from the battle now, and the roar still came to them distinctly.

Hester led Agatha to the other side of the house, and pointed to a broken window-pane.

"Yer see how dangerous it is, doan yer?"

Agatha looked out through the window to the black, distant smoke rising over the hills. The sounds seemed to be settling a little now. The intense, throbbing noise had stopped shaking the house. The battle was evidently subsiding.

Hester again spoke of the cave, and Agatha looked

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

down the sloping back yard to the level spot in front of the cave. As she stood there looking at it, Jeremiah put his black head out of the opening; then he emerged and came running toward them. Agatha went out on the back porch to meet him. He stood still when he saw her and looked his amazement. He wanted to make her believe it was the first time he had seen her. She did not know that Hester had led him up to the bedroom when she was asleep and let him gaze with joy upon his mistress' face. He threw his arms around her feet and tears of joy ran down his black face.

"It shore is you, Miss Agathy," he said, looking up at her. "I'se jest got ter pinch myself to make me believe it."

Mr. Windom went out on the porch, and the four people stood looking upon the scene before them. They had stood by each other through the troubles of many years, and now war had bound them still more closely together; they were like one family—the man and his daughter and the two faithful darkies.

"We have evidently beaten them back, father," Agatha said as the smoke and noise died down. "The danger of the day is past."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

She looked down the valley at the distant city of tents. The shells were still bursting regularly over it.

“Do you think we shall really have to use the cave?” she asked.

“Not unless they begin to shell the town from the rear. Jeremiah can fix it up for us in case we need it.” The old negro’s eyes still shone with joy.

“I’se doin’ dat now, Miss Agathy. I’se done tuk sum of yer geraniums down dar already, and I’se gwine ter hab de place lookin’ like er parlour befo’ dis day is ober.”

III

AGATHA came out on the back porch early next morning, and seeing Jeremiah currying the horses in front of the barn, she walked down there and sat on the edge of the water trough near him.

"Miss Agathy, I'se powerful glad you is back heah agin," was his morning greeting to her. Each one of his prominent white teeth glistened in contrast to his skin.

"But yer hasn't told me what yer done wid Selim."

Agatha turned her head away and looked over the hills.

"He is gone, Jeremiah," she said slowly. "We'll never see him again."

"Gone whar?" the old negro asked. "Did de Yankees steal him?"

"They tried to, but I wouldn't let them."

"I knowed yer wouldn't," Jeremiah answered.

"Whut you done said ter dem?"

His eyes brightened with his interest.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I didn’t say anything. I just shot him.”

The curry comb fell from Jeremiah’s hand. “Lordy, Miss Agathy, did you do dat?” he gasped.

“Yes, I did, right at the spot you told me, between the ears. And you should have seen him, Jeremiah. He just knelt down in front of me and laid himself comfortably out on the ground. He didn’t groan or anything. Oh! I hope I didn’t hurt him—I hope I didn’t.”

There were tears in Jeremiah’s eyes when she finished. He turned to the horse and began currying him violently, muttering indignantly to himself.

Agatha sat there and watched him a long time in silence.

“I am going down to the cave, Jeremiah,” she finally said, rising and passing by him.

“Youse jest gwine be tickled to death with that cave, Miss Agathy. I’s fixed it up jest like er house.”

He dropped the brush and followed her. They went out of the barn-yard and passed through the orchard to the sloping ground that led down to the cave.

Agatha went lightly along, jumping the bad

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

places, reaching the cave a few minutes before the old man.

A smile of interest and amusement was on her face as she stopped on the terrace, for in the bright, morning light the place looked comfortable and inviting.

A large piece of matting covered the ground. A table and some comfortable rocking chairs were placed about. At one side a wire stand, with several pots of flowering geraniums upon it, gave the place a homelike look.

Agatha went up to the flowers, touching them with the hands of a lover, and then turned to enter the cave.

A man stood in the entrance looking at her.

"You!" she gasped.

She thought at first that she was dreaming, or that it was an hallucination like the one she experienced by the camp fire and all through her sleep, but in a moment she knew this time that it was indeed he. The strangeness of his civilian dress, the danger of the situation, all flashed through her mind in a second as he came toward her.

Suddenly she held her finger to her lips and turned

away. Running to the edge of the terrace, she called to Jeremiah to go back to the barn; that she wanted to be alone. She watched him go slowly up the hill, and disappear in the direction of the orchard. Then she turned toward the cave, and walked up to Silas, starting as she noticed the blood-stained ground at his feet.

“Why are you here? What does it all mean?” she asked, conflicting emotions of fear and curiosity stirring in her voice.

Silas looked at her a moment before answering. He had not yet got over the joy of beholding Agatha, and had with difficulty restrained a shout of joy when he saw who it was. And now she was standing there before him, in a dainty white gown, the freshness of her morning toilette still shedding a fragrance about her, her pure, pale face turned up to him, with the deep black eyes of wonder. As he stood there, silently drinking in the sight, he was deciding whether to tell her the truth.

“I came through the lines last night as a spy. I am hiding here—for the present.”

Agatha shrank back as he spoke. An expression of disgust came into her face.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas flushed under the look in her eyes and stood silently waiting for her to speak. He could not tell her the motive that had actuated him in volunteering as a spy, lest it might condemn him even more in her estimation.

They gazed at each other for several endless moments, each waiting for the other to speak.

“Surely you can’t expect me to protect you?” Agatha asked at last. “You say you are a spy.” Her voice showed her contempt. “You have come into our town to find out our weakness; then you will go back to your army and tell them what you have found out. Am I right?”

Her voice came low and distinct.

“You have said what the word implies.” Silas answered.

“And now you are at my mercy, do you expect me to protect you? I know what you will say: that you brought me safely back to my home from the hands of the enemy. But there was nothing dishonourable in that. It could mean no harm to either side.”

She stopped a moment helplessly. “Oh, why did you do this?” she said. “You, of all the thousands of others.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas did not reply. He felt that to tell her the truth would be an insult.

When she had finished speaking, he looked away from her, down over the green valley. The expression of yearning in his eyes hurt Agatha, as the clashing emotions in her heart thrilled her.

Her patriotism was too well grounded to let gratitude destroy it. The conflict of right and wrong showed plainly in her face.

"No, I cannot do it. It would be dishonourable."

At her last word a groan came from the inside of the cave.

Silas turned and looked at her beseechingly, despair in his eyes. At the sight of Agatha Nathan had been forgotten.

"What is it?" she asked in alarm.

"My brother Nathan. He was shot in crossing the lines. That is why we had to stop here."

"Is he badly wounded?"

"It is a broken arm, and a large wound which will take long to heal. I have bound it up as best I could."

The full force of the situation came to Agatha as

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

he spoke. He made a step toward her and took her hands tightly in his own.

“You must help—you shall. Only assist me with Nathan, until he is able to move, and I will take him back into our lines, saying nothing. On my honour, I will. Won’t you help me now?”

He looked at her pleadingly. She could see his unselfish love for his brother burning in his eyes.

“He is my brother,” Silas continued. “I blame myself entirely for this trouble. If it had not been for me he would be safely in the camp now.”

He sat down on one of the chairs in a hopeless way.

Agatha was still struggling to decide upon a course of action. Her love for the cause that was making her people go to war was a part of herself. The suffering and privation to which they had been subjected during the two past years had only increased her love for the Confederate States and their rights. A loathing for the Federals had grown into her being since Butler’s Code, issued in New Orleans, had swept the whole South like a firebrand, leaving a burning hatred where before had been only natural antipathy.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

But, insistent above all, was her appreciation of what she owed this man. All her arguments gradually weakened before it, leaving her with but one desire—to help him in his extremity.

She made a step toward him, saying, “I will help you—on one condition.”

“And that is?”

“That you will not leave here until the siege is over and your army is driven away.”

Silas could not repress a smile at her expression. The vision of the tremendous army camped around the city rose up before him in all its might. He knew that it had come to stay until the flag of the Union hung on that grey clock tower.

“You shall not go back into your lines with all you know—but I will help you. You will be safe here.”

The decision was made; she would help him in his trouble, and in his care of his wounded brother, she would protect them from discovery, but there her help must end.

Silas saw all this plainly before she had spoken, and when she finished, he replied, “Then we are your prisoners.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha sat down in the chair, lost in thought. The difficulty of the situation seemed to grow now that she had consented to help them. How could she keep a secret from her father? It would be the first time she had ever done so. Yet she must have help, to provide the men with care and food. There was no one to do it but Jeremiah. She rose at the thought and told Silas her plan.

“You see I must have someone to help us. Jeremiah will do what I say, and assist me in keeping it from the others.”

“You know best,” Silas said. He was leaving the situation entirely in her hands. She must act for them all.

“We must have a doctor,” he said ‘decidedly.

“Is it absolutely necessary?” she asked in dismay.

“The danger of erysipelas is great. You know it is developing in all the uncared-for wounds, and, besides, I have nothing to dress it with.”

“But how can I get you a doctor, without telling everything? Don’t you see that it will be impossible?” Her face showed great anxiety.

“Then what *can* we do?” Silas asked. “He must

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

not remain in this condition. I shall have to tell all, and have him taken to a hospital in order to get well enough to be——”

“Hush—don’t say it.” Agatha threw her hands up to her ears to keep out the words.

“Well, what else is there to do? Can you think of anything?”

Silas began to stride up and down the terrace. Iron walls seemed to be hammering down upon him from all sides.

There was no escape in any direction.

“I am going to the house now,” Agatha said at last. “I am going to tell Jeremiah to bring you something to eat, while I go search for bandages and ointments to dress the wound with. Don’t walk out so far. They can see you from the house.”

She turned away from him and walked from the terrace. She had gone a few paces when she stopped, hesitated a moment and then went back to Silas.

Her face was a deep crimson when she spoke to him.

“I have your word of honour that you will not attempt to get away.”

“You have.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

He spoke low and distinctly. His eyes looked straight into hers. She turned away, satisfied that he would keep his word, and walked slowly up to the barn, busily formulating plans. As she came toward Jeremiah his voice startled her.

“How did you like it, Miss Agathy?”

He was rapidly running a wet sponge over the body of the old buggy, and as he dropped it back into the bucket of water he looked up, for the expected praise.

“It looks very fine, Jeremiah.” Agatha stood close by the buggy, glancing around to see if anyone else was near.

“Listen, Jeremiah—I want to tell you something.”

She stepped nearer to him, and lowered her voice.

“The man that brought me back home yesterday is hiding down there with his brother, who is wounded.”

Jeremiah stretched his eyes wide until the whites looked unnatural amid the black of his face. Then he uttered a low whistle.

“Is dey Yanks, Miss Agathy?” he said in a sepulchral tone.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha nodded.

“Den what is dey doin’ heah?”

“They were in the battle yesterday, and one of them got shot, and the other brought him over here to get some medicine. They did not have any in their camp.”

Agatha told the lie with shaking lips.

“So dey is got ter cum ober heah to git treated?”

“Yes, but you must not let anybody know, Jeremiah. For if it is known and they are found out, they will be——” She stopped, and Jeremiah finished the sentence by running his finger around his throat, and coughing.

Agatha turned away her face, in horror.

“Don’t you ever do that again, Jeremiah, unless you want to hurt me very much.”

“Does yer like him very much?” The cunning old negro looked up at her keenly.

Agatha caught at the opportunity to get better service.

“Yes, Jeremiah,” she said. “So much that if they were discovered, I believe it would kill me.”

“Den, I’s gwine help yer all I kin, if he *is* a Yankee.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Then come with me,” she said, leading the way to the house.

She first went into the smoke-house, and had Jeremiah take down several hams and pieces of bacon that were hanging to the dingy rafters. He laid them outside the door, and followed her into the rooms under the back porch, which were used for kitchen, pantry, and store-rooms. Agatha glanced around the walls, noticing with alarm the rapidly dwindling supplies on the shelves. She knew that nothing of any consequence could be bought in the town. The supply there had been almost exhausted a month ago.

She filled two large baskets with jars of preserved figs, bread, and packages of other edibles, which would last several days, and in that way reduce the quantity to be carried daily to the cave. She knew that she would have to exercise all her ingenuity to keep Hester from finding out her secret.

After giving Jeremiah all he could carry, she stood and watched him slowly descend the hill toward the cave. “I am getting it well stocked in case we have to go down there, Hester,” she replied to the negro woman’s questions.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Fur Gawd’s sake, Miss Agathy, is dey goin’ ter begin shootin at dis house agin?”

“Not that I know of, Hester, but they might at any time.”

IV

AGATHA went upstairs, and searched about the house for old pieces of cloth and materials that could be used for bandages. She found several bottles of tinctures and medicines, but not many suitable for the care of wounds. She sat down by an open window discouraged. Would the shells never stop? She turned her head away from the throbbing, heated glare outside, and began again to think over the dangerous position in which she was placed.

It was the first time she had done anything important without her father's help. She had gone to him with all her little problems and told him everything, getting the benefit of his mature judgment. But now she was like a boat without a rudder. The thought that these men's lives rested on her decision increased her anxiety. She became so anxious to speak to her father about it, that she got up and went quickly down to the library before she could change her mind. He was not there, but from the window she saw him sitting in the cool shade of

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

his favourite magnolia tree, a broad Panama hat pulled well over his face, and a palmetto fan moving slowly in one hand while he held a book in the other.

Agatha gazed at him affectionately. Surely nothing but sympathy and consideration for those in trouble could come from such a man, she thought, as she looked at him.

She got her sunbonnet and went out into the garden.

“Father,” she said, resting her hand on the back of his chair, “would it be my duty if I should ever meet the man who brought me back to town——” She sat down on the bench as her excitement grew, “Would it be my duty to help him get away if he were a prisoner?” Mr. Windom turned in his chair and looked at her. The protecting sunbonnet hid her face.

“Why do you ask, Agatha?” he said.

“Oh, I only wanted to know how much he had done for me and how much I ought to appreciate it.”

She tried to speak carelessly.

“He probably was a courteous gentleman and took pity on a woman in distress. You owe him a great debt of gratitude for helping you get back

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

to your home. But he was not wrong in assisting you. You were not fighting, nor a spy, and it could make no difference to either side where you were. With him it would be different of course. You could not help him to escape without being dishonourable to your country."

"What if he were wounded, father?" Agatha insisted.

"Then he should be turned over to a surgeon and placed in the proper place—a hospital."

Agatha's hands were clasped in her lap.

"Then you don't think it would be our duty to care for him and protect him until he recovered?"

"No, certainly not." Mr. Windom's reply was very decided.

He picked up the book and began reading where he had left off. He did not wish to lend too great importance to the subject in Agatha's mind. He felt that she was over impressed by what the soldier had done for her, and it was his desire to make her forget it as soon as possible now that she was safely home. The quiet, secluded life he had led for so long kept him from seeing any other side.

Agatha took the signal when he raised the book

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and began to read, and went back into the house listlessly. She was alone now—utterly alone. Her father did not approve of what she was doing; she must take the responsibility herself. Her only assistant would be Jeremiah, and he would simply be capable of carrying out a few orders. She thought of the few Union sympathisers that were in the town, but they could not help her without her father knowing it. Besides, pride kept her from asking aid of the people whom all her friends were shunning.

She grabbed up the bundle of cloth, and the bottles, and started out into the hall. The front door stood open, and she saw a man on horseback going by the house, evidently to the large fort on the hill. Agatha recognised him as one of the soldiers stationed there.

“I have good news for you,” he called out as he went by. She dropped the bundles and ran out to the gate.

“There is to be no shelling to-morrow,” the man continued. “They are going to stop for a day to give the men a chance to bury the dead who were killed in yesterday’s battle. You can go to town, or have a party, or do anything you want to.”



“ ‘WHAT IF HE WERE WOUNDED, FATHER?’
AGATHA INSISTED ”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas, recounting all sorts of anecdotes and experiences to his interested listener. It was Silas' first experience with the Southern negro, and he was much entertained by his dialect and quaint expressions.

When Agatha handed Silas the bandages he went directly into the cave to look after his brother, leaving Jeremiah and Agatha on the terrace alone.

"You are my only help, Jeremiah," Agatha said, sitting down near him. "My father does not approve of what I am doing, and would give them up if he knew they were here. You must help me all you can."

"You knows I will, Miss Agathy," the old man said. The sincerity of his accent encouraged her.

"Miss Agathy," he said, after a pause, "don' yer thinks I bettah tell dem 'bout de well inside de cave? Dey mout haf to hide sum day; yer can't tell when sum pussons is gwine cum meddlin' 'round heah."

Agatha looked interested.

"I didn't know there was a well, Jeremiah. Where is it?"

"It's in er corner of de cave—way back. Dey use ter say dat wuz de way de gamblers got de boys out.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Dey ain't no water in it now, and de hole goes all de way to de creek. You kin crawl trou if yer want to!"

Agatha was listening intently now.

"I never heard of that before, Jeremiah. Are you sure?"

The old negro stepped towards the cave.

"Cum in heah and I'll show it to yer."

Agatha hesitated a moment.

"Ask him if I may."

She pointed towards the opening.

Silas heard her and called out, "Come right in, and help me be doctor."

She entered the small opening, and stood in a large, vaulted room.

As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light she could see plainly the things about her. Pieces of old carpet were strewn about on the floor, chairs were there, and an old sofa which Agatha remembered had been stored away in the attic for years. Hester and Jeremiah had evidently searched for all the old, unused things that they could find. Wash basins, tubs, and several buckets of water stood on the shelf which was made in the earthen wall. The negroes had heard what the cave dwellers were using

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

in the town, and had taken them for example. Two small beds could be dimly seen in the back of the cave. Hester had added a personal touch to the place by hanging her most treasured picture in a gloomy recess. She called it "The Tree of Life." It represented a most flourishing tree, with large apples of different colours hanging from it. On each one was printed in large, black type the name of a virtue. Hester had memorised the names with Agatha's help, and knew what virtue each apple represented by its colour.

Near the opening where the light sifted in and the air was fresh, lay Nathan on a couch. Silas was tying up his wound and pouring the tincture over the bandage.

Agatha stood beside him, and looked down at the wounded man. They smiled their recognition to each other. He held out his hand and she took it in her own.

"You are our good angel," he said, the sweet expression coming into his eyes.

Jeremiah called Agatha to the other end of the cave, where the gloom was almost impenetrable. He had lifted up a heavy iron slab and was peering down

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

into a black opening. Agatha leaned over and looked down into the hole. She could faintly hear the gurgling water, seemingly a long way off.

Silas came up, and joined them.

“How deep is it?” he asked.

“’Bout ten feet, sah,” Jeremiah answered. “Yer kin git down ter de bottom easy on dis side.”

He pointed to some cut-out places on the side of the well.

“I am going into town to-morrow,” Agatha said, as they turned away. “There is to be no shelling because they are going to bury the dead of both sides in the trenches. While I am there I will see a doctor, and get some medicine.”

“Couldn’t we get back to the army if there is to be a cessation of hostilities?”

A gleam of hope flashed into Silas’ eyes.

Agatha shook her head slowly.

“The hostilities will cease only for the day. I should be a traitor if I let you return, and I will not be a traitor—I *will not!*”

She turned quickly from him, and fled up the hill before her determination could weaken.

V

THE intermission came. The morning of the day of rest dawned quiet and still. It was the first time the besieged town had known a calm day for months. People rushed from their houses, with the cessation of the guns, happy in one day's freedom from the shower of death. The caves gave up their pale-faced inmates, like the grave its dead. There was a wild clamour for the sunlight—fresh air—fresh clothes.

Jeremiah and Hester rose before daybreak, even before the mortars had ceased their night's work. Mr. Windom had told them they could have the day to themselves, and they had put on the best clothes they possessed and prepared to go into town for a day's recreation.

Hester had tied her black, matted hair into a flaming red and yellow bandanna. Her green and purple calico gown, gathered about her waist in ample folds, was set off with a much ruffled apron which Agatha had given her years ago.

Jeremiah looked at her with pride as she came out

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

of the kitchen ready for the day's excursion, a large basket on her arm.

"Fo' de Lawd, nigger, you must be thinkin' youse gwine to er party. You shore looks fine."

Hester showed her appreciation of the compliment by a broad and gracious smile.

"What you gwine do wid dat basket," Jeremiah continued.

"I'se gwine git sum fresh vittles for dese white foks to eat. I'se jest tired to death wid stale things."

Jeremiah brought the horse, already hitched to the buggy, out to the front gate, and tied him to the hitching post. It was left there in readiness for Mr. Windom and Agatha, when they should go into town.

Mr. Windom went into the garden after breakfast to read *The Daily Citizen*, as was his morning routine. The soldiers on their way to the fort left it every morning on the gate post. The little sheet had dwindled lately into a mere scrap, but Mr. Windom still read it with avidity. He had realised, when the huge army settled down around the town, that nothing but the concentrated force of the Confederate army could move the besiegers.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The paper, that morning, was filled with the events to take place that day, the number of dead, and where they were to be buried. As usual, there was a reference to the coming of Johnson. Each day, the paper said, brought him nearer to relieve them.

Agatha remained in the house, after breakfast, ostensibly to prepare for their day in town. As soon as her father had gone to the garden she went rapidly downstairs to the kitchen. Putting a tray on the table, she filled it with what was left from breakfast. She heated the pot of coffee, toasted the high rolls and waffles, and covered the tray, when it was filled, with a crisp white napkin.

Seeing her father still sitting in the garden, she raised the tray carefully in her hands, and went down the hill to the cave.

Silas was lying full length on the matting in front of the cave. His arm was thrown back, forming a pillow for his tired head, and he was fast asleep, his face relaxed from the anxiety Agatha had always seen upon it. She looked at him and wondered for the first time how old he was. She had never thought of it before. His personality, the calm suggestion of strength, had made age a neutral feature in her im-

pression of him. The idea came to her that he could not be much older than his brother. He looked young and boyish, lying there in the abandon of rest.

A movement from within the cave aroused her, and she stepped inside softly.

Nathan had heard her footsteps, and raising himself a little on the couch peered out. When he saw Agatha, he fell back into the reclining position, a smile of pleasure upon his face.

She pulled a chair close beside his couch and set the tray upon it.

“He is asleep,” she said softly, pointing towards the opening, “and I did not want to wake him. He needs it badly.”

Nathan smiled his appreciation.

“It seems so quiet this morning. Why is it?” he asked.

“I feel lost without that incessant noise. It has grown to be a regular lullaby and I can’t sleep without it. This dead quiet oppresses me.”

Agatha looked at him incredulously.

“A lullaby,” she exclaimed. “A lullaby of death. That is what it is to the town. They have stopped shelling to-day to give both sides a chance to bury

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

their dead. A great many were killed in that battle. Were you in the fight that day?"

Nathan became silent when she spoke of the fight. He lay staring fixedly at her. The dull expression that had lingered so long in his face that day came back to it again. The look frightened Agatha, and she began to move away a little from him.

"Don't leave me," he said beseechingly. "You are so sympathetic and kind. You are a woman and can help me." He shifted his position and leaned on the edge of the couch.

"Come and sit down by me, please."

Agatha pushed a chair near to the couch and sat down beside him. Nathan put out his hand and reached for hers. She took hold of it and let it rest in hers.

"I want to tell you something that is killing me, you will not be frightened, will you?"

Agatha shook her head quickly. It was with an effort that she controlled herself. The wild expression in Nathan's eyes alarmed her. She thought the wound must have made him delirious.

He gripped her hand firmly, and raised himself a little. The words came in a husky whisper:

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I am a *coward!*”

He fell back on the couch exhausted. An expression of great relief came into his face. He had told, at last, the secret that was wearing out his life. He did not relax his grip on Agatha's hand. The pain of it had become excruciating to her. He held to it, as a drowning man to a straw.

She waited for him to begin speaking again, but he lay silent, a long time, his breath coming in hard gasps. “Perhaps you are mistaken,” Agatha began, breaking the long silence. She thought he must have become unconscious. “You may have not been yourself.”

Nathan turned towards her again.

“Ah, but I was! It was premeditated. I knew what I was going to do before I went into the battle. I was crazy with terror. The first opportunity that came to me, I looked about for protection. There was a log bridge across the creek near where I was lying. I edged closer to it every chance I got. When the order came to charge, Silas rose from beside me and rushed forward. I saw my opportunity, jumped up, ran towards the bridge and crawled securely under it.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

He stopped a moment in his excitement. Agatha felt as if his grip were breaking her fingers.

“It seemed to me that I lay there years and years. The men tramping above me sounded as if they were beating down the bridge. I was paralysed with fright. My limbs hung stiff and cold to my body. I must have been mad. I did not tremble, but an icy, numb feeling left me powerless. It must be that way when one is dead. Time seemed to be standing still. Then, when I began to regain consciousness, I heard the men coming back over the bridge. When the blood began to thaw in my veins, I raised my head and looked out. The army was retreating in confusion. I saw my chance, crept out quickly, and mixed with the running crowd. No one ever knew. Not even Silas.” He stopped again, and furtively peered out through the opening of the cave.

“Oh, how I’ve hated and despised myself, since then! To think that Silas was in the front, urging the men on like a demon, rushing up to the embankment, and planting our flag gloriously on the enemy’s ground, while I was hiding down there under the bridge. I—the coward—the traitor.” He released Agatha’s hand, and turned his face away from her.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

He could not bear to see condemnation in her eyes.

If he had only looked, he would not have seen that, only a deep pity for the distressed soul that suffered. She leaned towards him and took his hand again.

"You will be braver next time. It was your first battle. It was only natural." The comforting words fell from her lips like balm upon Nathan's troubled mind. He looked at her less doubtfully.

"You see he had an object," he said, nodding towards Silas. "That gave him strength and courage. He was fighting for something beyond."

Agatha leaned closer, as the whispered words came from his lips.

"What object did he have?" she asked eagerly.

Nathan smiled up at her.

"Don't you know?" he said.

"No, how could I?" she answered. Her hand shook a little as she held his.

"He wanted to get to you. He wanted to be by your side again. He has thought of nothing else since he first saw you."

Agatha dropped his hand, and rose to her feet. She was glad that the glow of the cave hid her flushed

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

face. What Nathan had said did not come to her as a shock. She wondered afterwards that she had not exclaimed, or asked him some questions. A calm seemed to have come to her, with his explanation, and all that Silas had done for her stood out in complete detail, his kindness towards her, his kissing her hands when they had parted that night. She felt that a great responsibility was falling from her, that she was doing right in protecting them. A quiet satisfaction possessed her soul as she walked back to Nathan.

“I am going into town with my father this morning,” she said. “What shall I get for your wound? Does it pain you much now?”

Nathan saw she did not wish to continue the conversation. “It throbs a good deal and is very hot,” he answered. “Get something that will cool it.”

Agatha poured out a cup of coffee, and handed it to him.

“I’m going now. I will not awaken him as I go out. Tell him everyone on the place is away, and to keep on the lookout for strangers.”

She pressed Nathan’s hand gently, and went out into the light.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas was still sleeping, the shade of the flower-stand protecting his face from the sun. Agatha stopped again, and looked at him. It was with a new feeling now, a knowledge which made her timid, as she stood near him. She felt a great desire to kneel down beside him as he lay there, to take his head in her arms and softly caress the heavy black hair. She involuntarily made a step forward; then caught herself.

Turning away softly, she went up to the house, and to her room.

VI

SHE sat down in the cool, darkened room, and lost herself in a mist of memories. The great happiness still flooded her whole being, and she sat, quietly contented, under the spell.

Suddenly a new purpose came to her, that she should make herself beautiful. She arose, and went to a large armoire, which filled almost the whole side of her room, and began pulling out a quantity of dresses. She threw them on the bed and looked them over carefully.

The bright colours made a gorgeous display in their confusion. There were delicate tinted poplins, and taffetas, ruffled and embroidered linens, heavy brocades, and whole gowns of dainty tarletans. They were over a year old now, and had come from the far distant cities that had been cut off from the besieged town for many months. In fact, nothing of the outer world, its styles and doings, had reached the little town for more than a year.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha wanted to put on the prettiest frock she possessed, to make herself look as attractive as possible. Selecting a white poplin gown, trimmed with puffings of tarletan and black velvet, she put it on carefully, noting the effect of every detail. Then picking out of the mass on the bed a Tunis shawl of pale green and white stripes she threw it over her shoulders, and stood looking at herself in the tall cheval glass. It did not please her, and she took it off impatiently. She tried another frock of pink challis, with a little paletot of white silk, but not finding this satisfactory, she took this off also, and began dressing her hair low on her neck. Then she tried other frocks until she at last stood before the mirror in the only one that had not been tested. It was of old rose-coloured poplin, buttoned all the way down the front from high under the chin, to the floor. Huge pockets were placed on either side of the skirt, edged with a deep ruching. Her bonnet was of the same stuff as the gown, a large bowl in shape, and ornamented with a long plume that curled and drooped towards the back. Long streamers of pink ribbon hung down from the bonnet, with artificial roses placed at regular intervals.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha stood looking at herself intently, a delicate flush colouring her features. Her eyes sparkled and her lips were parted a little, showing the brilliant teeth. There was an elation, an expectancy in the pose, which had never been there before. In the reflection, she saw the change in herself as clearly as she had seen the character lines which developed after the horrible scenes in the country.

Once more she looked into the mirror, and felt satisfied. Then she went to her father in the garden and told him she was ready. He glanced at her proudly as they walked to the gate.

“You are getting more like your mother every day, Agatha,” he said. “I have noticed it since you came back from the country. Her expression has come to you lately. You know she and her sister were considered beauties in those wild, unsettled days. They were almost exactly alike.”

“Were they both dark like me, father?” Agatha asked.

“Yes, you are the embodiment of them both,” he said, looking at her admiringly again.

The stillness was almost appalling, as they drove towards the town. The penetrating quiet was still

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

strange to their unaccustomed ears. It was as if the life had gone out of the atmosphere.

As they crossed the bridge at the bayou gay noises began to come to them from the town. A band was playing at the Court House Square, and the merry sound was wafted across the city. People were crowding the streets, and stirring about everywhere.

Crowds of girls and children were running along, crying aloud with joy at their one day of freedom. The yards were filled with the women and children of the houses working steadily at the tubs, laundering the soiled linen. They had not had the chance to bathe for weeks. Others were busily engaged in sweeping out the houses. It was a real cleaning time, the first they had had that spring.

Agatha and her father drove up the long street into the town, stopping often to speak to groups of their friends. Every familiar face they saw carried upon it a smile of hope and encouragement.

Agatha had told her father how low their supply of provisions was becoming, and he drove first to the business street, stopping in front of the largest grocery store. She remained in the buggy while her father pushed his way in among the impatient crowd

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

before the door. Everyone was in search of food at the same time, and the excitement was almost a panic.

Presently Melinda emerged from the crowd, and hastened to greet Agatha.

“I hope you’re feeling rich to-day,” she said, holding up a small bundle. “That cost—well, you’ll see.”

“As much as your bonnet?” asked Agatha, smiling.

“Oh, that bonnet! I declare some of it’s sticking to my hair yet,” cried the girl.

“What with that and living in the cave I’m worn out! Horrid damp hole, makes me look just like a suet pudding.”

“Yes, with turpentine sauce,” Agatha called out, as her friend hurried away with her precious package.

Mr. Windom came out after a long time greatly excited. He held in his hand a list of what he had been able to buy, which he gave to Agatha, with a grim smile.

“I paid one thousand dollars for that,” he said.

Agatha picked up the receipted bill, and looked over the items. She read the list aloud, as her father drove along.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“One barrel of flour; one barrel of molasses; one sack of meal; one bag of peas; one bag of rice; one bushel of potatoes.”

“But there is no coffee on the list, father?”

“There is none in town,” replied Mr. Windom.

The exaggerated prices had become common to them now. Fear had begun to take hold of the people a year ago, and from that time on, the Confederate currency gradually lost its value. People would only take it when they could get nothing else.

Mr. Windom soon left Agatha at the hospital where she had told him she wished to leave the bandages. They were to meet later in the day at Mrs. Sentrill's.

The hospital was a large, white house, with an extensive yard and trees surrounding it.

Agatha opened the gate and went hastily up the walk. The wounded soldiers lying about in the yard brought back all the horrible memories again. She rang the door bell several times but the repeated ring brought no one. It only echoed harshly through the empty hall. The door stood half open, and she could see in the adjoining room men lying about on the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

bare floor. She walked into the hall a little way, looking around for someone with whom to speak. A woman, dressed in the black costume of a nun, came slowly down the staircase from the floor above. She looked critically at Agatha, her eyes resting on the fine dress. She did not stop to speak to her, but went on towards the room.

“Can you tell me where I shall find the physician?” Agatha asked, stepping in front of the woman.

The nun raised her eyes, shaking her head sorrowfully. “They don’t come here much. They come during the quiet hours, when the guns are resting from the shelling.”

“Then you stay here alone all the time?” Agatha asked in amazement.

“Some men are here to help me. The women said they could not stand it. It was too horrible. The sights here frightened them?”

There was a tone of biting sarcasm in her voice.

Agatha glanced beyond the woman into the room.

“Haven’t you beds for them? Is it necessary to leave them on the floor like that?”

The nun assented sadly.

“There are no beds. There are no medicines. A

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

shell burst in the medicine room, and we lost them all."

"And the people in the town are not helping you?"

The woman remained silent a moment.

"They are so frightened and starved themselves, poor souls, you cannot expect anything from them."

Agatha turned away. The tears were streaming down her face. She grasped the woman's hand, and kissed it.

"God help you," she said softly.

"His will be done," the nun answered, gazing into the crowded room of dying men.

Agatha went back to the street, and walked along slowly beneath the over-spreading trees. The awful horror of the hospital, and the comfort of her own home stood out, glaringly, before her. She was ashamed of herself for doing nothing to relieve the suffering of others. A strong wish to help the nun came to her. Then the memory of the work before her at home came back and she walked more rapidly towards Mrs. Sentrill's home.

When she reached there, she found Mrs. Sentrill in the yard, superintending her two negro women,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

who were washing the clothes and hanging them out in the sunlight on the fence to dry. She was filled with activity and excitement. The twelve hours' relief was too short for her to accomplish half of her work. When she saw Agatha, she rushed to her and put her arms about her. "I am so glad to see you, child. Robert tells me you were all upset when you got back. He says you don't seem to be the same girl, but I told him you would get over that soon. You were just a little nervous, weren't you, dear?" She led Agatha to the shady porch, and they sat down in easy rocking chairs. Mrs. Sentrill insisted on having all the details of Agatha's experience in the country, and the hours passed swiftly as they sat there talking over the possibilities of the siege. The sun was lowering in the western sky when Agatha rose.

"Mrs. Sentrill," she said, "I have just been to the hospital to get some medicine in case any of us got wounded out home, but they haven't a thing to give me. I thought possibly you might have something that I could get to take out with me. The negroes are alarmed very much since the battle the other day. The bullets fell all about the place, even broke a pane of glass in one of the windows."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Mrs. Sentrill took Agatha into the house with her, and opening the door to a big closet in the hall, she picked out several bottles of medicine, explaining the use of each. She also gave her a small chest of little bottles, medicine which she said she never used, and which might prove very serviceable. As they went back to the porch, Robert came up the walk towards them.

As he approached Agatha, he smiled and started to kiss her. She gave him her hand, holding herself a little aloof. A look of surprise and disappointment came into his face, but he said nothing.

“Your father met me at the Court House, and told me to come here and take you home. He has found a wagon to carry the provisions back, and will wait to go with it. I think we had better start at once. The shelling begins again at six o’clock, and it is almost that now.”

Agatha took her bundle from Mrs. Sentrill, and started down the walk with Robert.

“Take good care of the arnica, Agatha,” Mrs. Sentrill called to her as she left. “I hear there is very little left in the town. It is a valuable tincture, and we may need it at any time.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Robert helped Agatha into the buggy and drove rapidly down the hill.

“What is mother giving you arnica for, Agatha?” Robert asked. “That is what they are using in the intrenchments for the soldiers’ wounds.”

Agatha hesitated a moment. It seemed to her that now she had begun to lie, there was no end to it.

“I was afraid the negroes on the place might be wounded at some time, and as I had nothing in the house that would do in such a case, I asked your mother to suggest something for me to get. She gave me this. You know it is sometimes very dangerous out home.”

Robert reached for her hand and pressed it.

“Don’t go out much, Agatha,” he said. “We can’t have you hurt.”

As the horse pulled them slowly up the dug-out road, he turned to her suddenly:

“Your wanting the medicine reminds me that there is a belief along the lines that two Yankee spies have made their way into the town.”

Agatha felt her heart stop beating, but she tried to look indifferent.

“Two nights ago,” he continued, “the sentinels

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

on the line back of your house saw a black object run across the intrenchments and disappear in some bushes on this side. They fired, but hearing a dog howl a few moments after, did not look further. But in the morning they found a coat lying on the outside of the embankment, and the footsteps of two men, very distinct in the dust. One of them must have been shot, for there were bloodstains along the ground in the footprints. The men have been searching ever since, but cannot find them anywhere. The bloodstains disappeared on the ground back of your house, over there in the gulley." He pointed to the valley in the rear of her home, which they could see plainly now, from the ridge of the hill. "By the way, Agatha, do you ever use that cave, down there in the hill. It has just struck me that they might be hiding there."

Agatha had listened intently while he was talking, her hands tightly clasped to keep them from trembling.

"Yes," she answered, her voice husky. "We have had it fixed up lately in case we may have to use it. You know father has not been to the place in years. The associations are too painful. But I was down

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

there a long time yesterday. It is such a cool, quiet place to read. Jeremiah and I went all over it, and I am sure no one was hiding there then."

Robert noticed a slight trembling in her voice, but attributed it to the sad memories of the cave.

"Anyhow, I think it would be a good idea to have the place searched. The men may have concealed themselves somewhere. I think I shall report it to the Fort, this evening."

"Don't do that, Robert," said Agatha quickly. "It will excite father and do no good. I have been all over the cave and no one could possibly be in it."

"We will not disturb any of you in the least, Agatha," he insisted. "It really ought to be done, as much for your sake as for the town's."

Agatha's old affection for Robert was undergoing a revolution. From the day she had found out she did not love him, a quiet friendship had been left in its stead. The association of years had left her with a deep fondness for him. But, as he sat beside her, insisting upon a search of the cave, a feeling of dislike began to take its place. She moved farther away from him, so that the flounce of her skirt could not brush against him.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

As they drove up in front of her house he jumped out of the buggy, and held up his arms to assist her, but she pretended not to notice and getting out on the other side walked to the gate.

He intercepted her quickly, his face showing anger.

“Agatha, I want to know why you are treating me this way. You rebuff me each time I come near you. What does it mean?”

He stood directly in front of her, so that she was compelled to look at him.

“You have not been the same since you came back from the Federal camp. Did you fall in love with the Yankee who helped you to get back home?”

She flushed under the insult.

“I told you before you went away that I did not love you.” Her voice was cold and steady now. “But you would not believe me. You said I did not know my mind. You will find out some day that I did.”

“So I have been cut out by a Yankee, have I?”

His cutting tones followed her as she turned away and went up the walk.

She went into the garden and waited until Robert's buggy had disappeared in the direction of

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the Fort. Then she rose quickly and ran through the garden down the hill towards the cave.

Silas had pulled Nathan out of the cave, and sat beside him, both breathing in the fresh evening air. They looked almost contented. For the moment, they had forgotten their danger in the beauty of the twilight hour.

“You are discovered,” Agatha said, quickly drawing Silas a little away from Nathan. “They have found out that you crossed the lines that night, and they are searching for you now. Keep inside the cave, but remove all signs of having been here, and let the well stay open in case you should need it quickly. If I can, I will send Jeremiah in time to warn you.”

She turned away quickly, and began to ascend the hill before her father and the servants should get back home.

As she reached the top of the hill, she saw Robert coming back along the road from the Fort. He looked at the house and down into the orchard, then raising his hand to shade his eyes from the setting sun he looked down the hill towards Agatha.

She knew that he had seen her.

VII

AGATHA sat watching all through the long night. She had taken supper with her father as usual, and had gone to her room early in the evening, complaining of a headache—in reality to be alone.

She waited until she heard her father go to his room, and shut the door after him. Then, creeping down the long hall which ran the length of the house, she went out on the upper porch, and sat down, looking steadily at the scene before her.

Near by was the orchard,—a black spot in the dim lights,—and beyond the hills rose clearly outlined against the dark sky. She kept her eyes constantly on the flat space in front of the cave, except when the bursting shells lighted up the sky, when she would glance over the near-by ground and back again to the same spot.

The night was suffocatingly hot. There was no breeze—no fresh dampness to cool the atmosphere.

Agatha moved her large palmetto fan back and forth in her hand, slowly counting the hours as they were tolled out from the clock tower.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Down in the orchard another figure was crouching in the shadows. She had told Jeremiah to watch for anyone who might approach. If Robert had alarmed them at the Fort, someone would probably come early that night, but she waited in vain. Evidently they had planned to search without letting her know.

She felt sure now that Robert had told them his suspicions. The blood rushed into her face as she thought of being a suspect. A woman under suspicion, in her family! Nothing like it had ever been heard of. All of them had been held up as examples of their day and generation. Was she to be the one to break the proud line? The word "Traitor" wrote itself into the black night before her. She could see the cold stares of her friends when she was pointed out as the woman who had shielded the Yankee spies. And worst of all—her father. What would he think of her?

She got up from her chair and walked up and down the porch in an agony of fear and suspense. Gradually all thought of self was forgotten, and Silas appeared before her as she had seen him that morning at the cave, lying in the brilliant sunshine,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the youthful look on his sleeping countenance. Her whole being thrilled as she thought of him. The depth of his black eyes, the strength and force in his face, his tall, well-knit figure, each detail came back to her with a strengthened intensity.

She felt a craving to talk with him, have him tell her of himself. Ah! to feel his firm, warm grasp on her hand, as she had that night in the silent woods. She felt again the drowsiness that had come over her, when she fell asleep, to awaken with her head pillowed on his shoulder, his strong arms holding her tight against his breast. She had remained perfectly still in his arms, as if asleep, while he climbed up the long hill. She could see now the long, thick hair on his neck, stirred by her breath, and the brown mole under his ear in the very same place where she had one.

And when they parted he had kissed her hands, and asked if that was to be all. If that could have been all, she said to herself in her misery, if that had ended it—peace might have been left to her, but now—never. It would be nothing but one long stretch of sorrow. The soldiers would come and take him away, and she would be called a traitor for having

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

shielded him. Ah! that would be the only comfort left her—to know that when people shunned her it would be because of what she had done for him.

She pulled a light scarf about her shoulders, as the night wore itself away, but not until every object had become distinct in the morning light did she go back into the house.

VIII

WHEN she went down to breakfast her father noticed her pallor.

“What is it, Agatha? Are you ill?” he asked.

“No,” she answered. “Why do you ask, father?”

“You look as if you were, my child. I am afraid the trip into town was too much for you. I shouldn’t go any more for a while if I were you.”

“I don’t think I shall, very soon,” Agatha replied weakly.

She felt no courage to keep up the conversation. The awful suspense had begun to tell upon her. She was waiting for the inevitable to happen and she was certain that Robert would come that morning.

She followed her father out into the garden and sat down beside him. She yearned to speak to him, to tell him the terror that was consuming her and the new feeling that had come into her breast. It was so unusual for her to hide anything from him that she had not yet been able to adjust herself to the situation.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

As they sat under the magnolia tree a whistling sound came from above them. Mr. Windom started up from his chair and looked up to the sky. His hand trembled as he stood there.

“It has come at last,” he said hopelessly. “They have begun to aim at the Fort now, and we are in the circle of their fire. We shall have to go to the cave at once.” Another shell rumbled nearer this time. The startling explosion sounded only a few yards away.

Agatha felt that all sides were closing in upon her. Only one thing was left to her now to use the grief of her father to keep him from the cave. She was filled with shame as she spoke.

“Don’t let us go to the cave yet, father. I have been there several times lately, and I found it so painful that I did not remain long. I can’t get over the idea that the boys may have been killed there.”

The expression of her father’s face hurt her deeply. The idea that all truth, all sense of honour was passing from her forever, made her burst into tears. The old man held her hand in his tenderly, but his gentle touch was like fire to the girl.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The slamming of the front gate made her look up. Several soldiers had entered and were walking towards the house. One of them started towards the garden, having seen Agatha and Mr. Windom there.

Robert Sentrill came up to them with his bright smile and sparkling eyes. Evidently Agatha's attitude the evening before had not discouraged him. He showed no change; he was the same good-natured fellow, only Agatha detected a slight glitter in his eyes, a cruel excitement which she well understood.

Mr. Windom held out his hand to Robert cordially, as he approached them. Agatha forced herself to bow, a quiet "Good-morning" falling from her lips.

"You are up this morning early, Robert," Mr. Windom began. "I hope you will have that shelling stopped which has begun to threaten us this morning." He smiled as he finished.

"I only wish it were in my power, Mr. Windom. I have always considered any danger to you and Agatha as my own."

He paused and looked intently at Agatha.

She knew the moment had now come. She looked around for Jeremiah and saw him down in the barn-

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

yard busy with his morning work. He evidently did not attach any importance to Robert's appearance.

"Mr. Windom," Robert continued, "I have a very disagreeable task to perform this morning. Two Federal spies have made their way through the lines, and we have not been able to find them so far. They have been traced from the intrenchments near the Fort to the gulley back of your house. But at a certain distance, the bloodstains disappear, and we are unable to find any further signs. We are certain they are hiding somewhere about this place, or near here. I must ask your permission to search the grounds."

Mr. Windom had listened in surprised silence.

"I am under the impression that they have probably taken refuge in the cave."

As Robert finished he looked inquiringly towards Agatha. She returned his gaze coldly.

"In the cave," Mr. Windom exclaimed, looking at his daughter. "Agatha has just told me of having been there yesterday. You know we are fixing it up in case we have to use it. You did not see anyone there, did you, Agatha?"

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

She shook her head.

"But were there any signs of men having been there?" Robert asked her.

"None whatever," she replied quietly.

"Probably you did not look around much, Agatha," her father insisted. "They may have hidden far back in the cave. You know it is very deep."

Agatha was forcing herself to be calm.

"Jeremiah and I went over the whole place yesterday. We did not see a thing disturbed. I am positive no one could have been there."

Robert waited a moment when she had finished.

"Have we your permission to search the place, Mr. Windom?" he asked.

"Certainly," the old man answered. "If there are any spies around, we want to get them away from us you may be sure. The sooner they are strung up the better we will be pleased. Eh, Agatha?"

Agatha wondered how much longer she could stand it.

Robert turned away and called the other soldiers who were standing near the house.

"You two stand here and await our return."

He stationed them near Mr. Windom and Agatha,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and started off towards the orchard with the other two. Agatha rose suddenly and called to him. He came back to her quickly, his face beaming with excitement.

“I have a lot of my personal things down there. I would like to get them out of the way before the men look around much.”

She was trying to gain time, trying to plan some way to warn the men. She knew too well that the soldiers left behind had been instructed to watch her. Jeremiah was still currying the horse in the barnyard. She had tried many times to make him see her, but he had never looked up.

“It would be ridiculous for you to run any risk like that, Agatha,” said Mr. Windom. “The men might be in there now, and they might shoot you. Stay here by me until they have searched the place.”

Her father held her back when she rose. He spoke with determination.

Robert turned away with a quiet, satisfied smile. He felt that he held the door of the trap now. He raised his eyes as he turned away watching the whistling shell that sounded above them. Suddenly he threw his hands above his head.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Run! for God’s sake, all of you. That shell is falling here.”

He had not finished the words, when the deafening explosion came. Clouds of earth rose into the air, and fell about the garden in great heaps. The whole place shook for a moment. The trees shed a mass of leaves. The flowers fell from the plants, and one corner of the fence was blown yards away.

Agatha had risen from her father’s side and stood amazed. The men who had started for the cave had disappeared from her view. They were buried in the large mound of earth before her. One man was struggling out of the mass and calling loudly for help.

“Get a spade—axe—anything,” Robert called to the other soldiers.

“Here they are,” Agatha called, running towards the barnyard. She was at Jeremiah’s side before the men had caught up with her.

“To the cave, quick. Get them hidden.”

“Come right in here,” she said to the men, advancing. “I have sent the negro for the spade, but I think there is a shovel here.”

She led the way into the barn and helped them

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

find the tools. Then, returning to the mound of fresh earth, she carried a bucket of water with her.

Robert had already dug the soldier out with a fence picket, and the injured man now lay prostrate on the ground. They threw the water into his face, and in a moment he gave several gasps and recovered consciousness.

They carried him over to the tree and left him on the bench to recover. In a moment they had all quieted down again.

Robert called the men to his side and started towards the cave once more. Jeremiah had returned with the spade and Agatha knew that everything was safe. The certainty made her feel that all her strength was leaving her. She sat down on the bench by the wounded man and waited.

Her father was walking about the garden excitedly talking to Jeremiah and watching the shrieking shells as they flew above them. The aim of the battery that had ruined their garden seemed to be changed again. The Fort had evidently proved impregnable to their fire, and they had turned their attention back to the town.

Jeremiah began to clear the garden as best he

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

could, and Agatha waited in suspense for the return of the soldiers. It seemed to her that they would never come back. She looked constantly at the edge of the hill, yet no figures had begun to ascend. She got up and walked over to Jeremiah. He gave her one look and she was satisfied.

A half hour dragged slowly by before the searching party returned. Robert wore a chagrined expression upon his face. The light of excitement had died out of his eyes. He did not look at Agatha as he passed her, but went straight on to Mr. Windom. A few words passed between them which she could not hear, and Robert went into the house, followed by the men. A little later she saw them pass a window in her bedroom, and she knew they were searching the house. Her cheeks burned and she walked proudly from the garden and went into the house. The men were still upstairs, so she went out on the porch and waited for them to descend.

Robert came out first and stood before her. He showed plainly the realisation of his mistake. His pleasant smile had gone and his face looked weak and insipid. He stood before the girl, his cap in his hand, his head bowed.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I apologise humbly,” he said. “It was jealousy that made me do it. It made me actually believe you knew where they were. I am just seeing my insult to you now. Forgive me.”

Agatha gazed at him coldly.

“Won’t you try to forget it, Agatha?” he pleaded again, but started when he saw her expression. Her face was distorted with an expression of fierce hatred, which ruined its beauty.

He turned away hopelessly, realising that he had lost forever the love that he had once thought all his own. The men followed him out of the gate, and tramped on silently towards the city.

About noon Jeremiah came around the house to where Agatha was still sitting.

“Kin I let dem out of de well now?” he whispered to her.

She rose to her feet, startled. “Yes, of course. Have they been there all this time? Run, get them out at once. I don’t think we shall be disturbed any more.”

There was a tone of conviction in her voice.

IX

IN the besieged town people were beginning to lose hope. The patriotism that had buoyed them up was flagging. Death, other than that of the soldiers, had come among them. Fevers and smallpox were raging in their midst. The cisterns were becoming dry. Water could only be gotten from the river under the fierce fire of the gunboats. Provisions were giving out. Nothing was left now but the hope that Johnson's army was coming to release them. Even this hope died out as the days gradually drifted into weeks.

Agatha had not been in town since the day she had gone with her father. The dusty, glaring road, in front of the house, discouraged any idea of driving; besides the town held no attraction for her. It was difficult to find friends there now. Nearly everyone had forsaken their houses for caves.

When Jeremiah went into the town in search of fresh food, he came back filled with strange stories of what the people were doing. He had told them of the market, usually so resplendent at this time of

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the year, now a dreary, empty place, with nothing but mule meat and rats for sale. He had dilated at length to Hester upon the long rows of rats strung up in the market, skinned and ready to eat. The old woman would not believe him until he had taken her there, and she had seen the little animals herself.

He would sometimes bring back a small bunch of onions, the only vegetables he could find.

The food was diminishing rapidly now, and Hester was at her wits' end to get together a meal for the family. The coffee had given out long ago and there was just a little tea left. The flour that Mr. Windom had bought had turned out so bad that they could not use it. The only bread left them was the hoe cake which Hester took great pride in making to perfection. She and Agatha would plan for hours how they could make the same food into new dishes, so as to fool themselves into believing that it was something different.

The vegetable garden had dried up entirely. The orchard had suffered from the drought, the peaches drying up on the branches. Everything was against them—even Nature seemed to be favouring the other side.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Through it all, Agatha had been happy. The long days were sweet to her, full of new hopes, a new object, a growing happiness in the knowledge that she loved and was loved.

This was no trifling affection like the first had been. It was real, passionate, filling her life—the motive of every thought and action. No words of love had been spoken between them. It had not been necessary. Their eyes had said it for them.

In the long twilight, when the golden lights on the hill turned to purple, she would go down to the cave and sit with them, reading to Nathan or repeating the tales Jeremiah had brought back from the town.

Silas would pull Nathan out on the terrace, and make him comfortable on an old mattress, while Agatha would sit near him and turn the pages of his favourite books. He seemed most satisfied and happy when she read, especially if it were poetry. She would often read on until the light had faded away and left them surrounded in the night shadows.

Sometimes Nathan would fall asleep, leaving her and Silas a few moments alone. At such times they would talk of the things that had interested them

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

most, of the books they had read, of the places and things they wished most to see, the impersonal note always dominating their conversation.

It seemed to be the effort of Silas to keep it thus. In the silent moments when they were sitting near each other, he often looked at her yearningly then got up quickly and walked away.

Agatha did not understand. She did not know the thoughts that kept him back.

One night, when the June moon had grown resplendent in the sky, Agatha went to the cave, and asked Silas to come and walk with her in the shadows of the trees. He had asked her often, but she had always been afraid of his being discovered. But this night the beautiful pale light had influenced her. The night sounds had spoken to her and she could not resist their call.

She led him along the valley, and up through the wooded part of the hill, always looking about her carefully. The night was quiet. They passed quickly over the bright, dusty road, glistening in the moonlight, and went on into the protecting blackness of the beech wood.

Agatha silently led the way towards her favourite

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

spot, her secret bower. She knew instinctively that Silas would speak to her that night, and she wanted it to be in the place where she had always dreamed of that time. It would be more complete there—more real.

Silas followed her until they came out on the brow of the hill. He stopped a moment in amazement. "It is magnificent," he exclaimed.

Agatha sat down on the log seat, and after a little while Silas came and sat beside her. They remained silent a long time, looking out upon the wonderful scene before them.

The river looked like shining silver in the white moonlight. All else about it was lost in the black depths of the night, only the broad sweep of the stream standing out alone. Incessantly, from the black mass floating on the silver, bright glowing disks sprung up in the sky, leaving a trail of fire in their path. Sometimes the bright balls would burst, and a million golden stars would softly fall down and disappear in the silent river. It was like a giant war of meteors.

"This is my confidant," Agatha said softly. "It has been my heart companion as far back as I can

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

remember. It never told my secrets. I could bare my soul to it with safety."

Silas smiled at her. The moonlight made her eyes seem larger, brighter, than he had ever seen them. Her pale face looked like some fragrant, delicate flower.

"You are fortunate," he answered quietly, "to have someone who understands your sacred thoughts and ideals. Is it that to you?"

Agatha nodded. "Yes, it is my sanctuary," she said.

Silas turned towards her. "Do you know everything here is so different from what I have known, so much gentler, so much sweeter. Until this war came your life must have been like those long stretches of cotton fields that we came through on our way here, even, regular, smooth."

Agatha trembled a little as he spoke to her.

"It is not my life alone. It is the South; our characteristics," she answered.

"Still life here must be ideal. It is so calm and restful, without rush, or hurry. No one is pushing you. You are not crowded. There is a garden for everyone."

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“And the plantations,” Agatha added, “I love them more than anything else. The long fields of cotton, stretching out as far as the eye can reach, with not even a ridge to mar the green line where it melts into the sky. I love to watch the different changes take place; it is like watching a child grow. First the soil prepared, enriched, and ploughed; then the seed planted, and the little weak baby leaves coming above the ground. Soon they are large and strong and beautiful in the fulness of their strength. But soon there are white specks showing on the brilliant green, and almost before you can realise it, the whole field is white, as if with age. Then come the dried-up brown stalks like old withered men, and they have to be chopped down to make way for the new crop. Their work is done and they must be put out of the way for the new ones. It is just like our life, isn’t it?”

He remained still a long time after Agatha finished speaking.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

“I was thinking of the one memory that has remained to me, out of my childhood. This scene before me, and your voice as you sit there talking,

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

brings it all up to me so vividly. There seems to be something familiar about the place to bring it back so forcibly."

"Tell me about it," Agatha said softly.

"I must have been a very little boy then." Silas shut his eyes and leaned back musingly, as the memory filled his mind. "And she, my little sweetheart, must have been about four years old. I can see her just as plainly now as if it were only yesterday. She wore a little white dress and pink sash, and her black hair hung in two long plaits down her back, each tied with a pink ribbon. We were sitting on the steps of a big house, very much like yours, for I remember great white columns that looked so tall, to me, and we were weaving bracelets and necklaces out of clover blossoms. I made her a ring, using one of the blossoms for the diamond, and put it on her finger. Then I kissed her, and we promised always to love each other and marry like other folks when we were grown."

He stopped short and passed his hand across his brow, as if trying to remember.

"And have you never seen her since, nor heard of her?"

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas shook his head sorrowfully.

“Never. It must have been in some other life. There could have been no such experience in my childhood I am sure.”

There was a deep pathos in his voice.

“Couldn’t your father and mother remember where it was?” Agatha asked.

“I never had any,” Silas answered. “I’ve never had anyone that I could lean upon, or claim anything from except Nathan, and he has relied upon me as a father, himself. I have had to fight his battles and my own. But it has been the one bright spot in my life—his love and trust in me.”

“And have you never had a sister, any woman to take a place in your life?”

“None, except the old woman who raised us and sent us to school. She never meant much in our lives, nor we in hers. She was kind and did her part, but there was no sympathy between us. She said she was doing her duty by us, and that her husband at his death had made her swear to look after us until we were grown. We could never find out our parentage. All she knew was that her husband had brought us back with him from a long trip on the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

river, and told her to take care of us as best she could."

"And did she not even know your name?"

"I suppose not. When she died she left us two rings with initials cut in them, which she said we wore when we came to her. But they could help us to find out nothing. We gave up hope years ago."

Agatha's hand lay on the log beside him, and as he finished, he put his own firmly upon it and raised it to his lips.

"You asked me if any woman had come into my life, and I said no, but that was before I met you that morning beside your horse. When I saw you then I knew I had seen you before. It was in my dreams, for you were the ideal that had led me on and on through all those lonely years. I knew it was you at once."

He still held her hand in his warm clasp. It thrilled her and made her tremble in spite of her efforts to be calm.

"And when you left me that night and went across the valley back into your town, I felt that everything was slipping away from me, that the lamp which had burned for a few hours had gone out

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

forever. Do you remember—you stood on the parapet a moment while a shot was fired at you. Then you disappeared from my view on the other side. I stood there frozen for a moment—I thought you had been shot; and when I again realised what I was doing, I was flying back to our camp like a wild man.”

He waited a moment as a shell exploded near them, then as the night became quiet he continued.

“When we lost the battle I was in despair. It was my only chance. I felt that I must see you again, so I went to the camp and volunteered as a spy. You don’t blame me now, do you?”

He stopped speaking and waited for her answer. She did not speak and he turned away sadly, releasing her hand. “I know I have no right to force my love upon you after all you have done for me. But I cannot help it, Agatha. I love you, I love you—I love you.”

She leaned a little towards him as he spoke. He read the answer in her eyes.

A man’s footstep sounded near them. Agatha turned and saw a soldier standing a little distance away looking down over the river. He had not

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

seen them yet, and she moved a little closer to Silas to hide him from the man's sight.

The soldier looked up at her and started.

"Miss Windom!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here all alone?"

Agatha recognised him as one of the men stationed at the Fort.

"I am not alone. Capt. Sentrill is here with me."

The man touched his cap in salute.

"We are expecting a very exciting time to-night on the river. We have had information from spies that the Federals are going to run some boats of provisions by the Fort. We are on the lookout for them." He turned and left them.

"You had better go back home at once," Silas suggested to Agatha. "Let me stay here, and see the outcome of this."

Agatha looked at him reproachfully.

"Let you stay here and run the risk of being detected by the men. Never. Besides, I want to stay and see the boats myself."

At that moment a terrific fire opened up from the Fort on the hill near to them. They both started

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

from their seats and peered down into the darkness below.

Far up the river, towards the bend around the point, a long, dark object was drifting in the course of the stream. It came steadily down in front of the hill, directly within the fire of the forts. There was no light upon the dark mass that floated along so calmly. It did not return any of the downpour which the forts on the hill poured upon it. The mortars on the gunboats shifted their aim from the town to the fort on the hill, and in a few moments the whole sloping ridge was a mass of exploding shells.

"You must go back," Silas insisted to Agatha, as the danger became greater. "It is too dangerous for you to stay here."

She threw back her head and laughed a happy, careless laugh.

"I am not afraid, Silas. We can see the direction of the shells by their bright light, and avoid them."

She stood close to him, and he put his arm around her, while they looked down upon the wild scene.

The long, black object on the river had now reached a point directly in front of them. A large, wooden building, on the river front of the town, had been

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

set on fire to light up the scene, and show what it was that was running the blockade. By its penetrating light the whole river was illuminated with a vivid glow. Every tree along the banks stood out perfectly. Even the leaves were easily distinguished in the strong light, and the dark mass on the river suddenly developed into a long line of barges, drawn by a single unarmoured boat in front. The low, flat crafts were piled high with provisions. Bales of hay and corn, salt meat, barrels of flour—all shone distinctly in the light of the bright blaze. The fire of the forts continued to play furiously about the barges.

Where the shells exploded in the river, magnificent columns of water spouted high into the air.

The roar became deafening. Still the harmless-looking crafts floated peacefully down towards the town.

A wild yell of joy came from the crowds of people congregated along the bank. They had seen a little spark settle on the barge of hay. A small line of fire ran from it quickly, and in another moment, the whole line of boats was blazing high into the skies.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

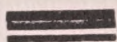
The forts stopped their firing. Their work had been done. But the mortars from across the river seemed to have gone wild in the anger of their defeat, and hurled a rain of fire upon the town with more force than ever.

Great clouds of smoke rose from the burning boats, and shut out the scene completely. The burning meat and corn filled the atmosphere with a stifling odour.

Agatha turned away, and put her hands to her face.

“That is war,” she said, a tremor in her voice. Turning away from the scene of destruction, they walked slowly back to the cave.

BOOK SIX



Recognition

I

“AGATHA, you are a very brave girl,” Mr. Windom said, a few days later, as they sat together in the withered garden. “You keep up your spirit wonderfully, and look as fresh as if nothing in the world were troubling you. I really believe if it were not for you, I should not have been able to stand this awful time. You buoy me up always with your hopeful face.”

Agatha smiled at him radiantly. She *was* happy. Every discomfort which they had undergone had passed over her happy spirit, scarcely touching her. Even the dry, parched flowers held a beauty for her. All life was a continued song of love. But one thing saddened her—the knowledge that Nathan was not improving as rapidly as they had hoped. His wound pained him still, and it seemed impossible to hasten its healing. Silas dressed it each day, with Agatha’s help now, but they looked in vain for the mutilated flesh to heal.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

He had become fretful and feverish, in the last week, an entirely new phase in his case.

Previously he had been only too glad to follow out all of their suggestions, and had rested peacefully under Silas' watchful eye, but the damp air of the cave and the confined life was telling upon him.

He had lost his bright colour; a sallow look had taken its place. His eyes had sunk deep under his brows, giving him a wistful look. Silas saw the signs of failing health, and the reflection of it showed in the misery of his face.

Agatha brought the most delicate food she could obtain, to nourish him and make him stronger. The hot sun made it impossible to bring him out of the cave until evening. Then he would remain there all night, Silas watching wakefully beside him.

Silas and Agatha watched the change come over Nathan without speaking of it. It pained the girl deeply to have Silas look at her with his eyes so full of pleading for the help for which he would not ask. Her love made her realise the suffering he was undergoing; her keen insight showed her the fatigue and anxiety that was telling on him, and threatening to break down the indomitable will.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

As the days passed, she felt that the time had come for something desperate to be done. And, constantly, as this knowledge grew upon her, she realised the necessity of telling her father. She lay awake at night planning how to approach him. She would tell him that for her sake he must help them, that it was for her love, her happiness, that she pleaded.

But how to approach him, how to lead up to the subject, so that he would hear all—let her finish—was what worried her most. She feared that he would not understand.

Several days passed and still she had not spoken. She was hoping against a certainty.

Finally she made her decision.

Her father had gone to the Fort one afternoon to get the latest information—the same old rumours of false hope.

She was waiting for the supper hour to come, to speak to him, and the uncertainty kept her nervous and restless. She went out to the garden and strolled about among the parched flowers. They gave her no quiet now, the gorgeous sunset sent no thrill to her bosom. She went straight back into the house

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

in an aimless way ; opened the door which led into the drawing-room. The large room, which ran the length of the house, was dark and gloomy. The musty smell of a long unused place came to her.

A long line of family portraits hung on the walls, stretching from one end of the room to the other. The staring eyes of the portraits made them seem like real persons. She imagined the gilt frames were windows, and all those queer, uncanny people were peering through them at her. At the far end of the room a large painting covered the whole side of the wall. It represented a family group, several generations past, and being painted in rich Vandyke browns, had the appearance of reality more than any of the others.

The principal figure, a man, was sitting at a large, massively carved table, holding a child on his knee. On the other side of the table was a tall, stately woman, dressed in a ruby-coloured gown, which caught the glow from the huge stone fireplace and reflected it. It was a home scene—the quiet happiness making itself felt down a century.

Agatha stood before the picture a long time. Then she turned and looked back at the others, but they

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

did not interest her like this one. It held her with a fascination which she could not cast off.

The man in the picture seemed staring at her with steady, calm, black eyes. She stood before him, returning the look, and an expression of understanding gradually came to her. She opened her lips in a startled exclamation as the strange familiarity of Silas' face came back to her. She knew now where she had seen it before. It was the face of the man in the picture—the face of her great-grandfather—Edward Tillman Windom.

She left the room slowly, the influence of the picture still upon her. Closing the door tightly after her she walked out of the house down towards the cave.

The place seemed utterly deserted. No one was on the terrace and all was still, except for a moaning which came from inside the cave. She entered hurriedly and went to the side of Nathan's bed. He was tossing restlessly and muttering in delirium, a glassy stare in his eyes.

Silas gave Agatha a look of despair as she entered, and then turned back to Nathan.

“The wound has broken open again. I cannot

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

stop the bleeding. He will die if we don't have a doctor. There is no use in putting it off any longer. If you will not go for one, I will."

Silas' voice sounded dull and hollow in the dark cave. Agatha put her hand on his shoulder and leaned over, looking at Nathan, who returned her look wildly.

"Silas, look at her. She is just like you. I can't tell you apart. Which is you, Silas? Am I seeing double?"

He shut his eyes a moment to keep out the vision. Then, opening them again, a gurgling laugh escaped him. "Isn't it funny, Silas, that she should be so much like you? I never noticed it before."

His uncontrolled laughter rang out through the cave, reverberating in its black depths.

Agatha placed her cool hand on Nathan's, trying to calm him.

"Do not talk," she said gently. "I am going to stay here with you until you feel better."

She stroked his hand soothingly, and he lay quiet for a little while. Suddenly his eyes fell on her hand, where the large ring glistened. He looked at it dully and then sat up in bed.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Silas,” he said in a low whisper, “she has stolen my ring. Don’t you see it there, on her finger? Don’t let her take it away, will you?”

Agatha looked inquiringly towards Silas.

“What does he mean?” she gasped.

Silas lowered Nathan slowly back on the couch, before answering.

“We have two rings just like yours. You know I told you about them the other night. He thinks the one you have is his.”

Agatha stood as if turned to stone. Her heart seemed to have stopped beating.

“You said they found them on you when you were brought to the woman who raised you?”

“Yes, but why are you so excited about it?” Silas answered. He kept his arm on Nathan, holding him down in the bed, while the delirious man still begged him not to let Agatha take away his ring.

“May I see the rings? Have you them with you?”

Agatha began to tremble violently.

Silas unbuttoned the collar of his shirt, and running his hand in, drew out a little chamois bag, which hung by a cord around his neck. The chamois looked

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

old and soiled, and had evidently been in his possession a long time. He took his knife and cut open one side of the bag, taking out two rings identically like the one on Agatha's finger.

She took them from him quickly, and ran to the entrance of the cave into the light. Holding the rings up she examined them closely. On one was cut deep in the stone the initials "E. T. W." and on the other "J. T. W."

She ran back quickly to Silas. He was still wondering at her excitement.

"Which is yours?" she asked. Her voice came in low, uncertain tones.

"I never knew. There was no record kept."

Agatha sank down on a chair in a bewilderment of hope and fear.

"My God, if I had only known it before."

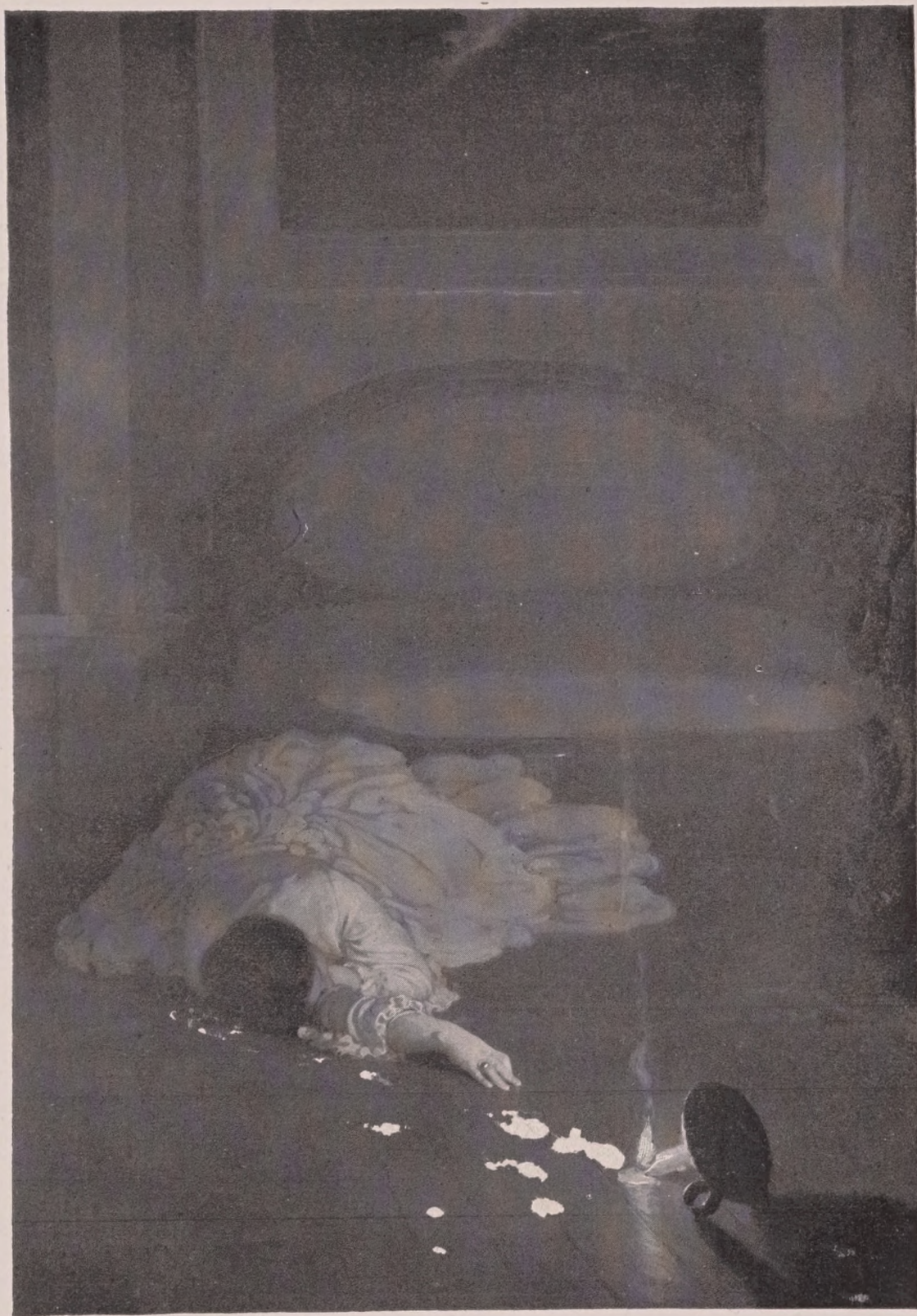
Her gaze fastened upon Nathan with a look of despair.

"What is it, Agatha? Tell me. What is the trouble?"

Silas left Nathan's side and stood before her.

She put her hands up to her face in a dazed way.

"I don't know yet. I think I am going mad."



“ THEN THE CANDLE SLIPPED FROM HER HAND, AND SHE
FELL TO THE FLOOR ”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Silas stood looking at her helplessly as she rose, and began walking nervously about. Nathan called to him again, and he went back and sat down by him. Presently Agatha came and stood beside them.

“I am going for a doctor now,” she said, clasping her hands tightly.

Silas walked to the entrance of the cave beside her, and as she started to leave he threw his arms around her and drew her close to him, kissing her again and again.

“Thank you, Agatha. It will save his life.”

She struggled out of his arms with an expression of horror on her face, and ran from him like a mad woman. He stared after her in the dim twilight, wonder and amazement on his face.

Agatha fled up the hill and into the house. She called loudly for her father, rushing from one room to the other. There was no answer to her wild cries. The empty house only echoed through its deserted rooms.

A candle was burning on the dining-room table, and Agatha took it up, hurriedly groping her way through the hall to the drawing-room door. As she entered, the candle light cast queer fantastic rays

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

upon the long line of portraits. She felt that they were a jury sitting in judgment upon her, their black, steady eyes looking searchingly into her soul. She groped her way down the long, slippery floor, to the large painting at the end of the room and holding the candle high above her head, looked at the man's face, steadily. The excitement passed from her. She stood riveted to the spot.

Then the candle slipped from her hand, and she fell to the floor. No tears came to relieve her. She lay there as if dead with a continual murmur upon her lips:

“God—don't let it be true! I love him—I love him.”

II

MR. WINDOM had left the house that afternoon, and had gone to the Fort. Many rumours had come to him lately of what was going on in the town. Jeremiah's description of the suffering and lack of food had made him feel that the end of the siege must be very near. It was almost with relief that he realised this, for their lives had been in danger for many months from the fleet of gunboats that had settled across the river, seemingly there forever. The shelling had gradually increased with the many boats that were added to the fleet almost daily.

And now that the town was entirely surrounded, all communication with the outside world cut off, the fire from the fleet was re-inforced by the sharp-shooting and bombs of the besieging army.

Mr. Windom knew the hopes of the town could not be kept up much longer. Johnson's army, upon which they had relied so absolutely for salvation, evidently could not come to their relief. They were left with this fact staring them in the face.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

There were rumours too of a conference between Grant and Pemberton, yet nothing definite had been given to the people. Expectancy filled the air.

The old man climbed up the embankment, and went down inside of the Fort. The four earthen walls hemmed in and protected a small square of ground, almost filled by a large tent and boxes of ammunition. An old stove and cooking utensils were in one corner, and in the centre, waving proudly in the air, was the Confederate flag.

Some men were lying in the shadow of the tent sleeping; others were crouching beside the huge guns mounted upon each side of the Fort, quietly observing all that was going on across the valley. One of the men started up from behind the cannon when he saw Mr. Windom and walked slowly along the parapet towards him.

His appearance was a signal for the enemy's fire, and a thick shower of bullets fell about him. One passed through his ragged grey shirt, leaving a clear-cut hole in its path.

"Damn you, Yank," he said, turning and shaking his fist at the opposite hill. "Try again if you want to." He came slowly down to where Mr. Windom

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

stood, and pulling two stools out of the tent they sat down.

“They try mighty hard to do something over there,” the soldier nodded indifferently across the valley. “*You* might get hurt, Mr. Windom. What brought you out, anyhow?”

Several of the other soldiers came up and gathered about them. They had become very fond of the old man during the long suspense. He had not forgotten them, and each day brought something refreshing to them from his home.

“I came to find out the news, boys. They tell me there is something going on in the town that we do not know about. What is it?” He looked up at them inquiringly.

“I wish to God they would do something,” one of the men answered. “We are all starving to death with nothing in sight to relieve us. I can’t see the use of keeping us suffering here for no reason.”

The unbroken silence showed that the others shared his views.

“There was a report in the town yesterday,” the man continued, “that Pemberton had sent to Grant’s camp to ask for an interview.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Yes, and he went himself,” another answered. “I talked with the men who saw him come out of the tent with Grant. They said he looked awful gloomy but that Grant looked more satisfied than ever. I heard later that Pemberton had offered to surrender on his own terms, and that Grant had said that he would accept nothing but unconditional surrender.”

“It is time Pemberton did something,” the first one said.

“Haven’t we been lying here for forty-one days, doing nothing but make ourselves targets for the Yankee sharp-shooters. Haven’t the trenches from here to miles below the town been filled with soldiers dying from wounds and fever, and those that are not sick dying from hunger. I tell you, it’s time to do something. I’m tired of all this show with nothing to back it. If Pemberton had gone about in the trenches, and seen some of our suffering, he would not have put it off so long. To-morrow is the Fourth of July, and those devils over there have been saying all along they were going to beat us that day. Right down there”—he stood on the embankment, and pointed towards a narrow part of the valley where the intrenchments were within calling distance—“a

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

fellow hollered over to me yesterday to look out for the Fourth. He said it was the birthday of the Union and they were going to celebrate it."

The other men listened, silently assenting to all the fellow had said. Their sun-burned faces did not hide the ravages of hunger and disease, which were slowly diminishing their strength. There was patriotism still in their breasts, but it had been dulled. Suffering had taken the sting out of defeat.

Mr. Windom heard their remarks with surprise. His quiet, close home life had kept a great many of the hardships from his observation.

He did not know that the soldiers had been almost driven to wish defeat. The outcome opened up before him in a vast scene of disorder and outrage.

If New Orleans had been insulted when it succumbed without a fight, what would Grant's army do to the little town on the hills that had been holding out against him for forty-one days. Painful thoughts rushed over him as he heard the men speaking, and a great fear for Agatha's safety sprang up in his heart. He knew that his home would not escape the onslaught.

"Then you think we are going to surrender?" he

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

said, lifting up his head and looking from one face to the other. There was no hope in any of them. He turned away silently, and went back towards his home.

The setting sun was lighting up the tall, white columns of the house and the whole place looked handsome and dignified.

Mr. Windom gazed at it affectionately. Tears dimmed his sight as he stood before the house that had sheltered him so long. Many memories rushed back to him; the wild days of the early settlers, the trials and hardships of maintaining a home in the wilderness; the brave spirit, and the encouragement of his beautiful wife; the loss of their son, which had killed her, and had broken his own spirit. Agatha and their home were all that remained to him. Would he live to see them taken from him also?

III

HE went up the long walk to the house, and stopped a moment in the hall to close the drawing-room door. He knew that the room had not been used for months and the open door attracted his attention. As he paused with his hand on the knob, a murmur came from the darkness and a faint glimmer of white showed on the floor at the far end of the room. "Agatha, is it you?" he exclaimed, when he had recognised her. "My child, what is it? Why are you here?" His voice trembled with alarm.

Agatha was still in the half conscious condition in which she had fallen to the floor. A murmur of words still came continually from her lips. Mr. Windom raised her in his arms, and carried her to the long sofa, which filled the space beneath the painting. He lighted a candle on the marble mantelpiece, and left the room to get her some water. When he returned she had calmed a little and recognised

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

him. She rose quickly from her reclining position, and staggered towards him.

“Go to the cave quick, father. There are two men there. They have on rings like mine—this one. The initials of Edward and Jordan are cut in the stones.”

She spoke in broken sentences, the thoughts coming from her lips without sequence.

Her father grasped her arms and held her firmly before him.

“What are you talking about, Agatha? Are you mad? Wake up, child.”

He almost shook her in his excitement.

“I thought I was mad, too, father, but it is true. One of them looks exactly like the picture, there. The one of Edward Tillman Windom.”

She looked towards the huge canvas.

Her father took the candle, and walked unsteadily close up to the picture.

“And the other one, Agatha?” He turned to her suddenly, a fierce light in his eyes.

“He is fairer—his hair is light—his eyes are blue. But the two men are very much alike.”

The candle shook in the old man’s trembling hand.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Agatha shuddered as she looked at him. A great fear overcame her.

“That is Jordan, Agatha. Do you hear me? The fair one is Jordan.”

“And the dark one, father, who is he?”

Her voice thrilled with the suspense.

“Your cousin, Edward.”

She swayed towards him and he caught her in his arms.

“Go to them quick, father. Jordan is dying. I—I am going into town for a doctor. Go, father, go *now*.”

IV

AGATHA ran swiftly down to the barn.

“Come with me quick, Jeremiah. I must go into town for a doctor at once. He is dying,—down there in the cave. Hurry as fast as you can. Bring the buggy to the gate. I will be there, waiting.”

In a moment she was back to the kitchen, giving Hester instructions about going to the cave. She did not wait to explain away the negro’s amazement.

“My father is there,” she said. “Help them all you can. One of the men is dying. I will be back as soon as I can find a doctor.”

She rushed back to the barn, and jumped into the buggy, followed quickly by the old negro. Picking up the whip, she lashed the horse into his utmost speed. In a moment they were flying swiftly through the heavy dust of the road; the gritty, powdered earth filling their eyes and almost blinding them.

The rain of fire was falling in thick sheets as the

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

batteries from the rear of the town hurled the shells upon them. The gunboats kept up a steady fire, until the entire town was brilliantly illuminated. The streets were deserted; the houses looked dismantled and forgotten. Many of them had fallen in; others had their porches and roofs torn off, and the fences had been blown from the lawns, blocking the street.

Agatha was forced to drive out of her way to pass a wrecked house that had been blown entirely over on its side and lay directly across the street. Ruin was everywhere.

The farther she drove into the town, the more evident became the desolation and the despair of the people. The streets were ghostly in their deserted lengths.

In her extremity she thought of the nun who had talked with her a month before. She drove directly to the hospital, wondering if the woman were still there, and would help her.

Sounds of moaning came to her ears before she had gotten out of the buggy. The entire yard was filled with wounded and dying soldiers. Death was among them, beside them, and pouring down upon them from the skies. There was no escape for them

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

anywhere. Their shrieks were piercing when the explosions startled them out of their delirium.

Agatha went into the hall and looked about for the nun. A man came towards her carrying a bundle of bandages.

“What do you want here?” he asked, in amazement.

“I am looking for a physician. Where can I find one?”

“There are none here. Look in the cave over there, and you will find them.”

He pointed to the sloping ground, a block away, which formed a knoll near the street.

“Sister Mary—where is she?” Agatha asked.

“A shell——”

She did not wait to hear the rest. She ran down the walk to the buggy, and drove down the street to the small hill—stopping in front of a cave. A group of men were standing near the opening, watching intently the fierce bombs and talking to the other men inside the cave. Agatha got out, and approached them.

“They told me at the hospital that I would find a physician here. Will you please direct me to him?”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The men stared at her curiously. One of them stepped forward and spoke to her.

“I believe it is Miss Windom. Can I do anything for you?” He came up near to her.

“Yes. I am in search of a doctor to go out home with me. A man has been wounded on our place, and we must get help for him at once. They told me I would find a doctor here.”

The man looked about him in an embarrassed way. “I’ll see if I can get him to go with you. Just wait a moment.”

He left her and disappeared in the opening of the cave. Agatha turned towards the buggy again to see if Jeremiah were safe. His shining eyes were peering out towards her through the red light.

In a few moments the man returned, shaking his head.

“Sorry, Miss, but he is asleep for the first time in several days and cannot be disturbed.”

“Can’t I see him, myself? Oh, what shall I do?” cried Agatha.

She made a step towards the opening.

“Don’t go, Miss Windom,” the man said. “It will do no good.”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“I must,” she repeated in a determined voice, and passed by him.

She entered the low opening, and went into the cave. It was a damp, ill-smelling place, with smoking lanterns hung about on the walls. Several men lay about in the sleep of utter exhaustion. Some of them had had to resort to stimulants to keep up their strength, and the heavy odour of whiskey was in the air. Agatha saw that there was no hope and made a movement to retreat. As she did so a deafening noise came from the outside. The walls of the cave trembled, and clods of earth fell down from the ceiling. The lanterns went out, leaving the whole place in utter darkness. Agatha groped her way to the opening and rushed out, but none of the tired men stirred.

She did not recognise the place where she had stood a few moments before. The nearby ground and street had been thrown up into great heaps of earth. A huge tree had fallen across the spot where she had left Jeremiah in the buggy. All before her was a mass of debris. “It was an eighty-pound Parrott,” she heard one of the men say, as he rushed forward to see what wreckage was done. They were too late.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

Jeremiah and the horse lay covered in the mass to one side of the street, both dead. A man held Agatha back as she started forward. "Don't go there. It is better for you not to see it."

"Is he dead?" Agatha gasped.

The man nodded.

An overpowering despair took possession of her. The whole world seemed to have turned against her. All the bright days of her childhood came back to her in that moment, all the little incidents in which Jeremiah had taken part back to the time when he had carried her in his arms as a little girl, to the bluff overlooking the river to see the race between the large steamboats. The huge, puffing monsters, the trail of red smoke they left behind them, and the loud blowing of their whistles had frightened her, and she had turned and hid her face on his breast. From that day he had been her protector. Then she recalled her first ball, when she had put on a hoop-skirt for the first time—how he had laughed when she had difficulty in getting into the carriage. Numbers of little incidents crowded her brain as she stood there in the group of terrified people.

"May I take you to some of your friends?" The

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

man's voice startled her into a realisation of her surroundings. The great need of her dying brother came to her recollection. She stood irresolute a moment, then determined not to give up.

"Where shall I find another physician?" she asked.

"I saw Dr. Williams going to the officers' quarters at Sky Parlour about an hour ago," said the man. "You might try there. May I help you find him?"

His kind tones encouraged her and grasping his arm she went with him down the street.

On the top of a high hill which rose abruptly from the street was a low, one-story house. Being a good place for observation, it had been turned into officers' quarters, and a large telescope was placed there, which afforded an extensive view of the whole sweep of the river. As Agatha approached, a band in front of the house was playing some gay music. Nothing but death about her—the voices of the dying and suffering still fresh in her ears, and yet people were gay. It struck her as incongruous.

Officers were strolling about the house, in fine uniforms, girls leaning upon their arms and chatting

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

merrily. It was the only note of gaiety in the whole scene of desolation.

“I will wait here,” Agatha said, stopping on the opposite side of the street in front of a church. “You go and find the doctor for me. Tell him it will mean a great deal to him, and don’t let him refuse to come.”

The sound of her voice was beseeching.

The man left her and went up to the house. She watched him mingle with the crowd, and then sat down on the church steps. The murmur of voices came to her from the inside of the church. She remembered now that Jeremiah had told her of the many families who had left their homes and sought the protection of the strong, brick church. They thought the sacred place offered them a certain protection.

She sat there a long time, waiting for the man to return and bring her some message of encouragement. The swiftly falling objects were raining about her still, some burying themselves in the earth, and disappearing without a sound. She looked wonderingly at the officers’ quarters, amazed that the range of the shells left it entirely free from danger. All the fear of harm to herself from them had gone

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

from her now, and the interest of the scene about her did not touch her. She sat waiting in a quiet, numb way.

Finally the man came out of the building and walked towards her. He was alone. She got up, and ran anxiously towards him.

“He has gone out to the fort on the hill near your house. You will find him there.”

Agatha left the man with a murmur of thanks, and hurried down the street, without looking behind her, till the lights from the gay house were lost in the darkness. The thought of Nathan's condition urged her on. She fled down the long street which led towards the bridge, until the loss of breath stopped her, and she leaned against a fence panting. The blood was surging madly in her head, and her pulses were throbbing.

She rested a few moments, and gradually the terror left her—her pulses calmed, and she raised her head and looked about. A sudden stillness had come over everything. The fierce, red objects had disappeared from the skies. The calm of death seemed to be wrapping itself about all nature.

She was left standing in total darkness except for

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

the pale moon rising over the distant hills. Amaze-
ment and wonder came over her at the sudden quiet.

She started down the hill, crossed the bridge, and
began the ascent of the long, dug-out road.

Her strength was fast failing her.

Far off rose the house, shining dimly in the moon-
light. Below her in the valley was the vast city of
tents, and over all, the strange, new quiet. It was
penetrating—intense. She put out her hand, as if
to touch it. It was so insistent that it was tangible.
The light trill of a bird sounded in a far-off tree. It
awoke strange sensations in Agatha. It brought
back the happy weeks that had just passed. The
passion of her love swept over her again and she
made a movement to rise. The horror of the belief
that he was her brother had left its influence upon
her. She could not free herself from it; the hor-
rible uncertainty; the mad horror which had over-
taken her at the first realisation. She almost began
to doubt again. What if her father had not remem-
bered distinctly.

She rose to her feet and ran rapidly along the
road. When she reached the gate, Hester and a
soldier were coming toward the house from the Fort.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The man carried a small black case in his hand. "I am the surgeon from the Fort," he said when he had reached Agatha. "This woman came for me. She says there is a man here wounded and that you wanted my services." They passed in through the gate.

"What does all this quiet mean, Doctor?" Agatha asked.

"It means *surrender*."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

V

HESTER led the surgeon down the hill towards the cave, and Agatha went into the house. A single candle burned on the dining-room table, shedding a fantastic, gloomy glow about the empty room.

Agatha hesitated a moment. An irresistible impulse was upon her to go back into the room with the long line of portraits and gaze at the large painting again. The thought that her father might not have distinguished between the men had remained with her.

She snatched the candle quickly and went into the drawing-room. The resemblance grew upon her as she looked at the painting. She noticed the same lines at the corner of the mouth that Silas had; and the nose which came from the forehead in a straight line. The hair waved back from the forehead in the same broad sweep. Even the figure of the man was identical with its clean-cut limbs and spare body.

The sound of footsteps echoed in the hall. Agatha turned around. There in the doorway stood Silas, peering into the dark room. The dim light shone

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

only on his face, leaving the rest of his figure entirely unseen. He seemed an unreal being.

Agatha stood spell-bound, watching him. It seemed to her that the many generations between them had slipped away and the two men—the one man—stood on either side of her.

“Come here.” Her voice came in an awed whisper. Silas’ heavy tread jarred the silent room.

“What is it?” he asked when he was beside her.

She led him towards the picture and held the candle close to the canvas.

“Look,” Agatha motioned towards the massive picture. The light fell full on Silas’ face as he stood there and looked before him.

Agatha watched keenly the change in his expression. At first it was curiosity at what she was showing him—then the interest came into his face as he studied it carefully. A smile hovered about the corners of his mouth as the face in the picture became familiar to him.

He stood perfectly quiet for a moment, and then the lines of his face deepened. Suddenly a look of age crept over his features, settling into an expression of utter horror.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

His hands went up to his face, and closed over his eyes, shutting out the picture.

“My God, Agatha,” his voice shook violently.

She stood silently before him, her face had grown grey.

“That is why you fled from me at the cave, to-day.”

She nodded her head slowly.

“It was the rings, I see—the odd familiarity of the place—the white columns of the house—the little girl with the clover blossoms—Ah, Agatha.”

He rushed towards her and threw his arms madly about her.

“She was not my sister though.” A wild gasp of joy came from his lips.

“But there is no certainty.”

She spoke calmly and slowly. Each word came from her as if she were weighing its effect—its full meaning. “My brother and my cousin were stolen away from us when they were little boys. The only clue that we had was the rings. You have them. But which of you is my brother?”

“But your father. He must know.”

“Ah, but I am not certain of that. He is old

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

and may have forgotten. My God, Silas, the doubt will kill me. If Nathan——”

Silas grasped her arm quickly.

“Come—quick, he is dying. God forgive me. I had forgotten him.”

He hurried from the room, Agatha closely following.

VI

THE small space in front of the tent was lighted with candles and a large glass lamp which Hester had brought from the house.

Mr. Windom had gone to the cave, when Agatha had told him the men were there, and had sat there, quietly talking to Silas. He had made up his mind fully not to let the excitement of the moment, or any false hopes lead him to the rash conclusion that these two men were his son and nephew.

He had asked Silas to tell him of his youth, noting the characteristics of the young man as he talked. In putting together the different memories Silas gave him of their childhood, he gradually became convinced that Agatha's surmise was true. He had called to Hester to go to the Fort and find a surgeon if possible, and then sat down beside Nathan watching him in his delirium.

When Hester returned with the surgeon, Silas went to the house to find Agatha and to bring some things that the surgeon needed.

"I do not think anything will save him but the amputation of this arm," Silas and Agatha heard the surgeon say as they came up to the cave.

The man was holding the lamp close to Nathan and examining him carefully.

"The wound is in a dreadful condition," the man continued. "Why has it not been attended to before? It must be old."

He raised his head inquiringly and looked about him at the pale, distressed faces. No one answered. No sound but Nathan's continued moaning broke the still night. He recognised no one now, having passed into a dull, unconscious state.

The doctor looked towards Mr. Windom for his answer. The old man's face was steadily changing as he looked upon the dying boy, and the light was going out of his eyes. At the moment that he recognised Nathan as his son, the sick man's identity as one of the Northern spies became equally plain. In the excitement of finding him he had asked no questions. But now with the agony of fear that the boy would die came the realisation that even if he should live by some miracle duty to the flag would oblige his father to denounce him to the Confederates.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

This short-lived hope had come like a flash of lightning, illuminating the scene for a moment, then leaving everything blacker than before.

He raised his head wearily, and looked at the doctor.

“Do what you can,” he said. “For God’s sake try to save him.”

His voice broke into a sob as he spoke. His face as he looked at Nathan again wore an expression of utter hopelessness.

The surgeon turned to Agatha, and asked for bandages and a basin of water. She drew a chair near to him and placed the necessary articles upon it. He then opened the black case which he had brought with him and began selecting the keen blades.

The candles flickered in the soft breeze that had sprung up and the light trembled across the instruments.

Agatha stood looking on the scene quietly. Every now and then a tremor passed over her, shaking her whole body.

“Have you any chloroform in the house?” the surgeon asked her.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

"No; there is none in the town," she answered.

"It would help me a good deal in keeping him quiet. He must be perfectly still while I perform the operation. Some one of you must hold his arm firmly. It will be necessary to keep him from bleeding as much as possible."

Silas came and stood beside the doctor.

"I will do it," he said steadily.

He touched Mr. Windom gently on the arm, and motioned him to let him have the place beside Nathan. The old man stood up, and looked about blindly. The meaning of everything seemed to be slipping from him. Agatha tried to rouse him. "Father," she said, "do you know that the town has surrendered?" He looked at her dully, then his face brightened. "Thank God," he said. "Then my boy can die in peace."

The surgeon called sharply to him to bring the lamp so that the light would fall upon Nathan's arm. Agatha went out and walked a little way further down the hill. She knelt down in the long, dry grass, and lifted her face to the heavens. The unfathomable depth above her was full of a sombre calm. The stars shed a dim glow into the limitless space.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

The peace of another world came gently down to her, and an all-embracing love seemed to speak to her out of the heavens. She wondered if the spirit of her mother—the mother she had never known—had come to her in this time of greatest sorrow, and was comforting her. The tears ran slowly down her cheeks, the tears of joy in the knowledge and belief that a higher power was watching over, and taking care of her.

The soft touch of a rough hand came upon her as she knelt there. It was Hester.

“Is yer cryin’ ober heah all by yerself, honey?”

The old woman’s voice was full of sympathy. The drawling tones sounded sweet to Agatha. She turned to the negro woman and laid her head in her lap.

“Oh, Hester, do you know who they are?” Agatha asked softly.

“Who yer talkin’ ’bout, missy?” she asked.

“The men in the cave, Hester.”

The old negro shook her head wonderingly.

“They are my brother and cousin, who were stolen away from us years ago. You remember, don’t you?”

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

"You mean Massa Jordan and Edward?" Hester asked.

Agatha assented.

"Dat ain' possible, Miss Agathy. Dey is been dead too long ago to talk 'bout," she said incredulously. "Whut makes yer tink dat?"

"But I am not mistaken, Hester. We know it positively. Besides, Jeremiah——"

Agatha stopped short. She raised her head from Hester's lap, and gazed into the negro's face.

"Hester, did you know Jeremiah was dead? A shell killed him when we were in the town. I had just gotten out of the buggy."

Events had crowded so thickly about Agatha that she had forgotten for the moment the loss of Jeremiah. Hester stood up and stared wildly at her.

"Don't say it's so, Miss Agathy. Dat ole nigger, Jeremiah, he ain't dead, is he?"

Agatha did not answer. The two women stood clasped in each other's arms, mingling their tears. Their common sorrow had brought them closer together than ever before. A startled exclamation aroused Agatha. She looked towards the cave, and

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

saw that the lamp had gone out. She ran towards the place, and saw the disaster.

Her father stood upright in the centre of the terrace, the lamp smashed into pieces at his feet.

“The birthmark—the birthmark,” he cried.

The words came steadily from his lips, in a whisper. The surgeon was calling excitedly for a light.

Agatha seized the two candles that were burning near by, and kneeling down beside Nathan, held them close to the surgeon. Her determination saved her from swooning at the sight of so much blood. Her hands held the burning candles steadily and firmly. The hot wax trickled over her fingers continually, but she did not even feel it. Every few moments her eyes would lift to Nathan's face, and as she looked once at his bared breast she saw a deep red mark across his heart. She knew now what had aroused her father. It was the birthmark which she and her brother had both borne. Silas was near her, and she leaned against him to steady herself. Once she lifted her face and looked into his eyes. There was nothing but dumb misery there. She felt that he had forgotten his love for her in that for the dying man.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

At last the surgeon stood up. He had completed his work, and turning Nathan carefully on his side, he drew a sheet lightly across him.

Silas and Agatha watched his face for some signs of hope.

“I have done my best for him,” he said. “The morning will tell you the rest. He may live.”

Picking up his satchel he left them and climbed slowly up the hill.

Hester sat off to one side of the terrace staring at the scene with wide-open eyes. Mr. Windom had walked farther away from them and sat down, his head bowed in his hands. Silas and Agatha sat beside the dying man, their hands clasped in each other's.

The moon, floating like some white, cool orb, passed over them, and disappeared into a bank of clouds that had risen out of the west. The candles burned low, and gradually went out. A rustling sound came from the trees near the cave, then the chirp of a bird, followed by many other tingling sounds and a misty grey pallor announced the dawn.

Silas and Agatha looked at Nathan as the morning light grew brighter. He was perfectly still now.

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

He had stopped breathing with the first ray of the coming day.

“Father,” Agatha called softly.

The old man rose and came over to the couch.

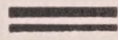
He knelt down beside Nathan, and laid his head upon the dead man’s breast.

“My son,” he said simply.

Silas and Agatha raised their heads, and looked steadily into each other’s eyes.

It was the look of love across the Valley of Death.

BOOK SEVEN



Peace

I

THE Fourth of July dawned peacefully over the town nestling upon the hills. The mortars had finished their ceaseless work of many months. The terrific crashing noise, the shrill whistling of the Parrott shells, the thundering echoes, reverberating down the valleys, had died away forever.

A multitude of grey-coated men crawled out of the intrenchments. The haggard, careworn faces told too well of the long siege of suffering and disease. Their sun-burned, matted hair, their ragged, torn clothing, the glitter of starvation in their eyes, made them look wild, almost barbaric.

As the morning advanced, they formed into straggling companies and marched forward to meet the conquerors. They stacked their arms before the foe, laid down their hopes—gave over to them the town that had withstood fire and sword for so long a time.

With the laying down of their arms, their spirit

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

seemed to be broken. They knew that what they had been fighting for during the past two years had slipped from them. Nothing was left but to go back home, and take up a new life—a life for which they were unprepared. Sorrow and despair were waiting to meet them at the dear old gate where happiness before had only stood.

The conquerors knew this also. It took the joy out of their success. As they marched into the deserted streets of the town, there was no cheering, no demonstration over the victory.

Their quiet sympathy and respect showed admiration for the foe who had withstood them so long.

As the army marched up before the Court House, and stood beneath the grey clock tower which had told them the time of day across the hills, a man stepped out from the ranks and taking off his hat, gave a resounding cheer.

The bluecoats turned away from him in silence. The sound seemed out of place.

“Three cheers for the gallant defenders of the town,” the man cried, and the whole army took up the shout heartily.

The broad river—which had so peacefully swept by

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

for months, without even a craft to disturb its quiet bosom—became suddenly alive with a gorgeous fleet.

A small flag-boat led the procession, decorated with many banners and flags. Then came the entire fleet, the boats crowding each other, to reach the town into which they had so long thrown their fiery missiles. Despatch boats, rams, ironclads, hospitals and sanitary barges, transports, all floated along in full holiday attire; their decks were filled with soldiers and sailors, joyously waving their colours, and cheering as they came into the town. They laughed into the silent faces of the guns upon the hill.

As the iron monsters were moved and anchored, the inspiring sound of martial music floated out on the air.

With the fall of the town came the beginning of the end.

II

AGATHA opened the hall door, and came out on the front porch. Everything was perfectly still, except the rustling leaves of the beech wood across the road.

The sky was brilliant. The sun shone dazzlingly upon the dried, dead grass. The garden looked barren in the bright light. The dusty road was deserted, and afar off, where the Fort stood, the flag-staff had been cut down, and the red and white colours were seen there no more.

Agatha passed down the walk slowly. She crossed the road and went through the shadowing beeches with a lagging step. She waited a moment in the cool shade and then walked out onto the brow of the hill. She was in her sanctuary again.

She looked steadily before her listening to the sound of the rushing water beneath her. It was the same old theme that she had always heard, but now she understood its meaning.

Three themes came to her now as in a fugue,—

T H E H E A R T O F H O P E

“Ruin, Desolation, Death”; each fought with the other for supremacy, each seemed to prevail, until the whole mingled into a steady rhythm. She listened intently.

Out of it was coming another voice: sweet, penetrating, gradually sounding above all else. The others had quieted now, forming only an accompaniment, subdued by the beautiful melody. It was love. Love coming out of the depths of suffering. And with it came to Agatha a wonderful peace.

She smiled upon the scene. All these years it had been teaching her, preparing her, and she had listened and learned without knowing it. It had opened her eyes, awakened her, when she had not known her real feelings. It was now showing her that out of all she had been through was to come to her the perfect happiness.

She looked up suddenly as someone approached, an expression of quiet joy shining in her eyes.

For it was Silas.

THE END





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021667043